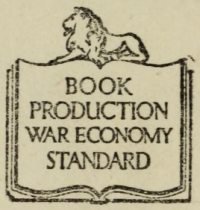
To Barbara

from

Bill G

Xmas 1984

VERDI



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS.

FRANZ WERFEL

VERDI

Translated by
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PREFACE

It is twelve years now since this book was first planned, but the writing of it has always been deferred. There were artistic reasons for hesitation—the hesitation that an historical theme always awakens. It would be necessary to move at once upon two separate planes, the poetic and the historical—to walk simultaneously in the world of fable and the world of fact. And there were many dangers to be encountered by the way.

The nearness to our own day of the period in which the story unfolds was a danger. It is always a delicate task to deal with the events of yesterday, in which so many of our contemporaries have been concerned, without violating the allegiance which an author owes to truth.

Even greater was the danger of handling a romance dealing with the world of art. In speaking of a famous man, a great creative genius, it is always easy to be betrayed into exaggeration and insincerity. It is an error into which many fall.

But purely æsthetic dangers are not a serious obstacle. They have only to be realized to be overcome. The real ground of the delay lay deeper. It lay in the nature of the hero of the story himself.

How could a man who shuddered at the thought of publicity, who spoke of the Press as the scourge of modern life, who held the posthumous publication of letters to be a crime, and destroyed his chances of success in Paris, as Rossini has told us, because he loathed the necessary round of visits—how could such a one be made to figure as the hero of a romance ?

His love of music, his devotion to it with a whole-hearted passion that never loosed its hold upon him, the sinking of himself, his life and all its interests, in his work—all these were his masters to the end. He will not surrender to us unconditionally, we may be sure. As the indulgence of the reader was invoked in the old romances, so this work must crave the indulgence of its hero, who would not have suffered the smallest infringement of the truth concerning himself. But the truth of a life is not to be found in the strictest analysis of its biographical material, nor in the sum of all its doings and sayings. From these we must win, yea, we must create this truth for ourselves—the mythical legend of the man, that which is purely and peculiarly his.

The Maestro himself realized this and, in a letter upon the mystery of art, stated it in the pregnant sentence,

"The truth we copy may be good, but the truth we discover is better, infinitely better."

F. W.

Breitenstein,
Summer, 1923.

CHAPTER I

A CONCERT IN LA FENICE THEATRE

THE cold, unearthly radiance of a monstrous Christmas moon was pouring through the water-gate of La Fenice theatre and lighting up the gloomy entrance of a long corridor that led to the brilliant foyer beyond. Along the embankment, drawn a little away from the steps and pillars, several gondolas lay in the shadow of the mouldering green walls that rose immovable out of the blackness of the canal.

The gondoliers, whose first intention had been to slip into the theatre in the wake of their patrons and find free standing room to listen to the music, had been sadly disillusioned. The orchestra massed there in their black coats—all the musicians were in evening dress—were making an interminable, wearisome din. And there were not more than fifteen persons present to listen to it. Far better be outside to-night when the December festival was going on.

The men had been sitting for a long time now in a tavern on the theatre square. At intervals one of them would stand up and stare behind him to see whether the performance were not yet coming to an end. They had not been cheated of their music after all. In the open door of a neighbouring booth a wounded soldier had taken up his place and the tall stem of a small violoncello stood between the knees of his faded uniform. This relic of the *viol di gamba* of the middle ages, which has mysteriously strayed into our times, was bewailing its fate under the soldier's bow. In the tavern, where the waiters were laughing and squabbling together, stood a pair of street singers, a boy with a mandoline and an old blind woman with horrible empty eyeholes and a shrill piercing voice. Besides these, everybody who passed through the square was either singing, humming, growling or whistling some scrap of melody, tuneful cries or laughter broke from each unclosed door, and every quarter of an hour on this sacred night the pealing of bells broke like a cataract over the city of Venice from all her towers.

Above the main entrance of the big, alluring theatre, with its blue and gold emblem of the singing swan, powerful gas lights blazed in their milky glass spheres. The gilded lattice of the wide doors was half closed. No loiterers stood before it, even the programme sellers, who at other times assailed the unmoved church opposite with their shrill cries of "*Libri del opera! Libri del opera!*" all through the performance, were missing to-night.

In the great foyer, with its flights of marble steps leading up to the boxes, gleamed numberless tiers of lights burning in their globes or behind trellises. Exaggerated black shadows were thrown over the twin recesses, in one of which stood a white empire stove, while from the other the giant head and sarcastic, disdainful features of Rossini—a bust presented by "the Company" in the year 1869—looked down with scant toleration upon men and things.

Two ladies, dressed as carefully as if for high mass, with mantillas veiling their fashionable coiffures, entered in fluttering confusion. Arriving almost at the end of the first act, they would, on another occasion, have taken their places as quietly as good manners demand of late-comers. But to-night they whispered together excitedly, jostling each other in front of the mirror while they patted their hair and dabbed their cheeks, and finally disappeared, swinging their skirts, up the deserted stairs to the first tier of boxes.

The brightly lit foyer was left empty when they had gone; on the buffet in the background an array of champagne glasses, and food no longer displayed for sale, stood untended. The silence, bathed in the blaze of the gaslight, was broken only now and then by the clash of the orchestra—loud, disconnected chords, sounding through the thickly padded doors of the auditorium as one may

hear imperious, defiant words coming from a neighbouring room when a hitherto inaudible conversation becomes heated.

The long corridor that led from the entrance hall of the theatre to the Canal la Fenice was lighted only by three oil lamps over the emergency exit. The whole length of the gigantic mass of the auditorium and stage was left in shadow and seemed to hang in the darkness like a vessel in dock. Two small flights of steps led up to the door, and out of little round windows the greenish-yellow rays from the festively lighted interior shone into the night like summer sunshine. Through the lower apertures, too, one could see the underwork of the stage and the apathetic watchman following his dreary calling by the dim light of a lantern.

An old man in the dark-green livery of the theatre staff was patrolling the gloomy passage with echoing footsteps. He wore the white forked beard of the Francis-Joseph period, clipped out to leave the chest free for the display of medals or orders. This style of beard was not rare among old people then, for it was the year 1882, not much more than a decade after the deliverance of Venice and the union of the kingdom.

This functionary was holding an aggrieved argument with himself. He seemed to be out of humour with his surroundings, stamping loudly to and fro as if with the idea of protesting to his superiors and to the audience that he was doing his duty, and at the same time venting his unexplained anger by disturbing the performance. Suddenly lifting his head, and straightening his heavy, somewhat bent figure, he advanced with the severe deliberation of a policeman confronting an offender, to meet a man who was quietly entering the corridor.

"No admission to-day. It's a private performance."

The individual thus addressed wore a dark-brown overcoat and held a wide-brimmed black hat in his hand. Standing still in front of the official, he looked at him with slow, rather misty blue eyes, whose absent gaze had to be recalled from the distance. Their dreamy intensity was overshadowed by boldly arched brows, and they expressed no resentment but only a mild surprise that anyone should have the audacity to make such a remark to him. In spite of the naturally growing short beard already shot with white, and the hair which, though it fell in soft, youthful waves round the large, widely opened ears, was more than tinged with grey, no one would have thought of calling the man old.

They would have been contradicted by the sturdy farmer-like figure, strongly built and delicately finished as a fiddle body and wearing its clothes with a quiet indifference which was ten times more indicative of youth than any conscious correctness. A large, well-curved, sunburnt nose, and a whole system of little wrinkles round the eyes which from time to time blinked in the darkness as if in bright sunshine, gave to this face something of the shrewd look of a farmer contemplating his distant fields at evening, mingled with the boldness of a pirate scanning the seas from the deck of his ship, but most of all it was the face of a man of outstanding character, self-possessed and self-assured.

The gods, to whom eternal youth belongs, by no means always wore the form of youth, but often appeared in mature manhood—Jupiter, Neptune, Vulcan. With this man, too, age was but a form of god-like, timeless youth.

Rousing himself, after gazing in his absent way long and hard at the door-keeper, he advanced again.

"No admission !" repeated the other harshly. "The theatre is engaged for a private performance."

The wrinkles round the stranger's eyes smiled—a charming smile.

"So ?" he said. "Then I must go round, Dario."

The old man with the Austrian beard stood speechless, he made a clucking sound and then, a light breaking on him, he began to beat his head, his red eyes rolling.

"Ass ! Idiot ! Beast that I am ? He recognizes me and I did not know him. Oh, Signor Maestro ! What shall I do ? My heart is in my mouth ! There you are, unchanged as ever, and I did not recognize you ! So you are paying us a visit ? A surprise visit ? By Bacchus, it is long since we had the

honour before, Signor Maestro ! Wait now, it was in the year sixty that you honoured us last. No, in fifty-nine, during the Stagione, before the war. Or was it earlier still—my head is in a whirl—that you brought out Boccanegra here ? They have played many pieces since then, Signor Maestro—many new pieces, but nothing worth while, between ourselves, Signor Maestro !"

"I am glad, Dario, to find you still at the theatre."

"An old soldier, a poor old soldier." The electrified Dario took up his tale. "Was I not here when we did Ernani ? Ah, there's beauty ! There's music ! '*Si ridesti il leon di Castiglia!*' That's music! That's beauty! I know them all, every one of them. And now, because I am old, they send me, me who have seen so much, down here to be a door-keeper. Forty years I have worked up there, in the choir, the lighting, as mechanic, as stage porter. You knew me, Signor Maestro, you knew me ! All the Maestri gentlemen knew me. And always gave us our due, too. Always a little extra when we had a roaring success ! But bless me ! You are honouring us. You must not stand here ! You must be received. I will run and tell the secretary."

"Nothing of the kind." Verdi patted his arm. "Nobody has heard a word of my being here. I was in Venice for the day and am going back to-night. It was only by chance that I happened upon the old theatre."

"I understand ! Incognito ! Not a word ! A king's visit."

"And inside ?"

The Maestro nodded towards the auditorium. He knew very well what was being performed there and his own question displeased him as he put it.

"Inside ? Oh, they are playing that German fellow."

"What German fellow ?"

"Oh, that one whose birthday it is, or is it his wife's birthday, I don't know ? Or perhaps they're performing his music because it's Christmas."

Dario was evidently not happy on the subject. He looked down uneasily at his worn, lumpy boots, avoiding the Maestro's eye.

"What is the German's name ?"

"Wagner. Harry or Richard or Frederick or something. They are playing a symphony of his. He is conducting it himself. It has lasted almost an hour, this symphony, and there is no opera to follow. A queer, wrong-headed devil of a fellow, this Wagner. People say all sorts of things about him."

"What do they say ?"

"Why, he wants to do away with the intervals. Imagine it, Signor Maestro ! That people should sit in rows and listen to three or four or five acts without moving or speaking or daring to blow their noses—through a whole opera ! What sort of nonsense is that, I ask you ? When people have sat out one act and enjoyed it, they want to move about a little, to stretch themselves and look at the audience and talk to each other and criticize the singers. But no, all that's to be put down, just as they've put down hissing."

"Is that all the mischief he has done ?"

"Oh, I hear worse things than that. In one piece the unbeliever has put the holy Sacrament on the stage. That's a sin ! It's not suitable for the stage."

The Maestro no longer seemed to listen. His gaze was fixed on something in the distance. Only after a pause did he ask indifferently, as if he were merely protracting the conversation for some reason.

"And what, in your opinion, Dario, is suitable for the stage ?"

Dario began to stammer. Then with a decisive sweep of his arm he cried,

"A good song ! A song that strikes home. Operas with good songs in them."

At this moment the final C-major of the music swelled out strongly on a wild crescendo of kettledrums. After the moment of complete silence that follows such a performance the applause broke out in loud sustained '*Vivas!*' The younger musicians, most of them pupils of the Benedetto Marcello Lyceum, acclaimed the Master.

Dario gave vent to his ill-humour.

"I must go back to the buffet. It is my duty unfortunately. Excuse me !"

With heavy, elderly steps he went out into the foyer, turning again to say in his simple, self-important way, "Signor Maestro ! Wait here for me. I won't keep you long ! I'll be back with you directly."

It surprised Verdi to find himself unconsciously obeying the old official. He could still have returned to his gondola through the long empty corridor. But with a strange mixture of motives that he did not himself understand, in which curiosity was the least potent ingredient, he stayed, even moving forward into the foyer.

An uncomfortable sensation grew upon him as he stood there, an inheritance from his humble childhood and unsettled youth, which a long life of unprecedented triumph and a brilliant position in the eye of Europe had never entirely conquered. It was the sense of being an unauthorized intruder, venturing without invitation into some exclusive circle, an uneasy, abashed timidity in spite of his sixty-nine years.

Meanwhile the audience, of which the young musicians of the Marcello Lyceum, in their black coats, formed the chief element, had collected round the buffet. With the noise of popping corks and quick, staccato Italian chatter there was mingled the sound of a broad German voice with its thicker, heavier vocalization. This sound gradually gathered itself into a distinct, steadily flowing stream of talk which neither applause nor shriller voices could drown.

With the unfailing memory which distinguishes all men of great ability, the Maestro had already discerned several faces that were familiar to him. There was Count Boni, the President of the Conservatorium of Venice, an aristocrat-artist who was darting importantly about the room on various superfluous missions. Farther off stood Cavallini, the clarinettist, once a concert-Corypheus and now immersed in orchestral work and teaching. Finally there was Filippo Filippi, the leading musical critic of the "Perseveranza."

Signor Filippi, who could boast of having received several slightly ironical letters from Giuseppe Verdi, was one of those musician-authors who are distinguished neither by their musical nor their literary gifts. But, by dint of their sole talent, the power of adapting themselves rapidly to the need of the moment, and gauging with precision the extent to which profit can be made out of the current craze, they are able, once the errors into which their self-conceit may lead them are retrieved, to gain an ever-increasing influence and finally to establish themselves in a position of unchallenged respect.

The Maestro had just recognized Liszt, and was looking for Schutz; instead of leaving the house as it was still possible for him to do unperceived, he quickly mounted the four steps to one of the doors of the hall. The darkness of this slightly raised position gave him a feeling of shelter.

The circle was dispersing. Several students passed Verdi on their way down the corridor to find gondolas to take them home; Wagner's young children followed, staring with astonished and excited eyes at the unwonted spectacle, and blinking for want of sleep. They were in the charge of their grandfather, the Abbé, who was talking to them in an affected manner, half condescending, half admonitory.

Then came the great man himself, the crowd pressing and pushing behind him. Wagner wore evening dress under a light overcoat, and carried a silk hat in his hand. The great vaulted skull, with its pale covering of downy white, shone transparently, as if an unearthly light burned within it. His slight body swayed with the force of the restless vitality that was pouring from him. He spoke loudly, emphasizing the breadth of his expansive German vowels, expounding, explaining, bantering, and he was the first to greet his own wit with sympathetic laughter. No one seemed to notice how the earthly vessel of this fierce vitality throbbed and quivered as if over-charged. But his wife, beside him, was anxiously trying to calm him, to stem the torrent of his words, to hasten his steps and, as soon as might be, to rescue him from his crowd of followers.

The young men, to whom Wagner's words and gestures were addressed, seemed beside themselves. With the wild eyes of fanaticism, the relaxed lips of intoxication, the whistling breath of ecstasy, they drank in his words without understanding them. No, it was not the words they drank, but the mere sound of his voice. They drank in the life of this man, whose vitality was ten times greater in volume and higher in power, it seemed, than that of any other.

Maestro Verdi stood quietly in the shadow of the high doorway. As the intoxicated throng swayed towards him, he realized how little he valued the storms of applause that had come to himself, the torchlight processions and the worship that a whole nation had offered him—all the deification he had experienced—counted for nothing to him, it was offered not to the maker of his melodies but to the melodies themselves. The five letters of his name had become the burning symbol of Italian music. But they were only a symbol. The man behind that name, behind those works, remained dark, he lived unknown by the side of his achievements and his triumphs. But this man standing four steps from him, whose voice was in his ears, was a living, disturbing force, one who had already robbed him of friends with lofty disdain, a force that set plain men at variance, and carried them out of themselves, that overshadowed the whole world of the spirit like a great cloud from which light and colour and shadow fell at once. And as he gazed at that figure, surrounded by the pressing crowd, the consciousness grew upon the Maestro's mind that here it was not the work that counted, but the man. Here, as with the Corsican usurper, the work was the man. He perpetuated himself continually, the weakest took his impress, and the very stones over which his feet passed were subject to him for ever. His work was bound up with him, his fame and he were one, and as far into the future as his ardent soul might reach, he would be deathless.

He was standing now, close to the doorway where the Maestro was. Some one had made a remark in French and Wagner hastened to answer it. While he was searching for the French phrase he turned his head and saw the man up there in the shadow.

Verdi's reverie had transformed him, the mildness which characterized his face in later years had given place, as he stood there, to the gloomy sternness of his youth. The blue, deep-sunken eyes were cold, every lineament expressed the reserve of sensitive strength. In that eventful moment the eyes of the two men met.

The drama of the stars unrolls in æons, that of men in hours or days or years, but the history of the soul is instantaneous and unconscious.

Wagner beheld the face of a man whom he did not know, the face of a stranger over whom he had no power, a face firmly closed upon itself and seeking nothing of others. He saw pride and a solitary reserve in the glowing eyes, an effortless energy, which sought to borrow none from him, which stood apart and expressed itself without any secret desire to influence or master other men.

Verdi beheld an eye that was at first questioning, perplexed and searching. But soon the cloud vanished and from that eye the inborn light flamed out, seeking love, seeking to attract—a stormy, strong, and yet feminine soul, imposing its will, uttering its dumb, self-inspired cry, "Be mine."

The audience had disappeared through the dark portals of the theatre and the gondoliers could be heard chaffering, but the Maestro still stood in his place. His look of quiet simplicity had returned and softened the features on which the reflection of a vision still glowed.

Dario reappeared, utterly distracted.

"Oh, Signor Maestro ! I ought to have announced the honour that you were doing us. I have made a blunder. I shall be dismissed for neglecting my duty. You are a public personage, they can imprison me for it ! Madonna ! We have had members of the royal houses here. There are rules about it. Long ago when one of the Imperial family, that accursed archduke, came, it was, 'You will stand here and you must stand there !' And when the Emperor

Napoleon himself was here, that Radetzsky or Bismarck, one of those Germans, tried to shoot, it was the same. Signor Maestro, shall I go and fetch the secretary ?"

"You will hold your tongue, Dario, and not talk nonsense."

A gold piece slipped into the old man's hand.

The huge, unnatural moon reigned in and over Venice. Softly shimmering mists lay on the canals from which all the boats and gondolas had now disappeared. The last notes of the bells were dying on the air. In the deathly whiteness the stone masks on the ruined gateways wore a distorted grin.

With a small English valise before him the Maestro sat on the padded seat of the gondola—"the sluggard's seat" as he always called it. The world of the little canal was dead. There were no figures moving over the arches of the bridges, no shadows passing under the lamps of the low porticos. As he rounded a corner, the gondolier, high in the prow, sent out his piercing cry that seemed to stab the glittering, deathlike sleep of the city.

From time to time the man dipped his oar into the element that seemed to be something more complex and human than water. With a hardly noticeable motion the boat glided on, till the force of the stroke was expended and its progress checked again. This ceaseless alternation—long note ! short note ! long ! short !—is the mother of all barcarolle; "Venetian six-eight time," Verdi had christened it in the days when he was working there on Rigoletto.

To-night this rhythm did not please him. He did not like water and dreaded every journey by it. Was it by accident that he had been nearly drowned in the little pond in his park at Saint Agatha ? Water was an abyss. He had never mastered its unplumbed depths. All that had rhythm he pressed into his service, what was water that it should defy him ?

The disquietude which had troubled his spirit for years rose at this moment to anguish. In a desperate effort to pin himself down to the commonplaces of reality he began to pass the last three days in review. His thoughts beat to the soft, rocking motion of the boat: "On the twenty-first I left Genoa. Peppina was not at all pleased. It annoyed her. Very natural. She does not like me to travel by myself. I am sixty-nine now.—Was this business in Milan really so important ? It seemed so to me in Genoa. A couple of contracts signed, for the new Boccanegra and Don Carlos in Vienna. After all Ricordi might have come to me. But one must go now and then to keep the publisher in order. It is still an unconscionably thievish trade ! Precious rascals ! Even the bookkeeper looks artful as soon as I appear.—And Boito ? That Othello of his is not bad ! Quite out of the ordinary ! But it's absurd to think of that. I shall never write any more.—There must be a kink in my nature somewhere, that it all came to an end in my sixtieth year. Here I am in my seventieth now without four phrases to my credit since then. Still, a man must live out his useless days to the end.—Suppose I did write and produce a new opera ? The Press would make some good-natured comments upon 'the worthy master of Saint Agatha' and it would go into the repertoire of all the barrel organs. The lofty European critics would say, as they have been saying since Don Carlos, that I am a nice little pocket Wagner. I nibble at his harmonies ! I translate his sublime polyphony into my simple Busseto tongue ! Ah, away with it !"

Like the call of a forest beast the gondolier's cry tore the stillness of the night. The Maestro laid his hand on his valise.

"This Lear is a curse to me !—Well ! My health is sound enough, at all events. I've got over that old heart trouble. I can climb four flights of stairs two steps at a time and not set it beating as it did at twenty. But this sensitiveness is certainly a sign of old age. Why else was it that I had tears in my eyes more than once when I was reading Nabucco and Battaglia di Legano the other day. Out-of-date rubbish ! There are no variations of time in the middle of a phrase, no highfalutin emotional effects, no consecutive fifths or dramatic pauses or acrobatic twirls of modern self-conceit in them ! And just because

of that there is something about them—something great ! Yes, to me and to no one else ! Basta !—And what is this visit to Venice but sentimentality ? Even before this was I not turning too soft ? How it wrung my heart, when Ricordi told me that old Vigna was ill here, dying ! The Venice of fifty-one and fifty-three rose up before me irresistibly. Vigna ! That was a man ! A fighter, an explorer, a discoverer ! We used to see each other home till three o'clock in the morning, and how our minds seethed as we argued !—And there was Gallo, our buffoon ! An unblushing animal, a good-hearted Venetian ! He ought to be preserved in a museum as the last of the nefarious and glorious line of Barbaja and Merelli !—Ah, well ! Soon I'll be climbing stiffly into the train and leaving it all. When one is old oneself one should not visit the dying. There he lies, a poor, shrivelled little figure. Man has but a slippery hold on life. The greatest doctor cannot save his own. And you, also ! The new generation and their science will march on over you."

A sudden question flashed into the flow of the Maestro's thoughts. "Was it merely to see a sick man that I came to Venice or did something lead me here ? Am I trying to deceive myself ?"

Along the great canal, past St. Angelo, glided the gondola. The mists were rising and the façade of the Palace rose starkly out of the swaying, silver-scaled surface of the canal. A stone's throw further on, three gondolas rose and fell languidly. It was the Wagnerian party returning from La Fenice ! These were no ordinary hired boats like that in which the Maestro sat, but aristocratic gondolas with three man-servants in each.

The occupants sat in silence. The soft plashing of the oars was swallowed up in the death-like unreality of the silent night. Presently the little flotilla stopped, and the secret counsel of the fates decreed that Verdi's gondolier should not attempt to pass it but let his craft float quietly a little way from the middle boat of the three. Wagner was sitting by his wife. The high, rounded head, to which the enchantment of the moonlight gave a strange, embryonic air, was lying back with closed eyes. The vital energy that had pulsed within that frame like an overcharged engine, the ardent eagerness, the desire to rule that had stamped every feature, were no longer there. Was he overcome by weariness, soothed by the rocking of the gondola or charmed by the dangerous influence of the moon, as he lay there, asleep or awake, in the magical night of the spellbound city ?

Rising a little in his seat, Verdi gazed with fascinated interest at the German.

This, then, was the man whose name, whose work, whose being had pursued him under a thousand forms for twenty years. Now that their eyes no longer encountered he could gaze his fill.

Into every line, every word concerning his own art that he had read during these years the name of Wagner had entered, tacitly or openly, to disparage him. Not only in the Press, but in all the relations of his life, even in the intercourse of those nearest to him this implicit comparison continually arose. He thought of Angelo Mariani, with his great gifts, and the bitter disappointment that he had suffered through him. He had dared, that conductor, to break his word to him, cynically, as if the matter was of no great moment. He would not conduct the *première* of Aïda. And why ? Because *that* no longer interested him. His ambition soared higher. He meant to conduct Lohengrin or even Tristan. And it was not only Mariani who had played the Judas. In every criticism, every encomium, every congratulation, through all the admiration and adulation that was offered him, Verdi could trace this bitter drop. In his letters, in his talk with his intimates, in the whispering of averted heads when he was recognized in Genoa, or Milan, or Parma, in Paris where they had performed his work recently, and, chiefly, in his own self-esteem he found this hidden current of depreciation. But how to name it ? It was not a coolness, it was not any failure of affection, it was not contempt—it was nothing tangible or sensible. And yet behind every speech his ear, sharpened by suspicion, could detect the implication : "Yes, you are a great man. You are the celebrated Italian genius. A monu-

ment of the past. But it is the past. The day of your puppet shows, your stage heroes and ranting Furiosos, the day of pretty tunes, is over. You have had your time and your triumph. Rest now in peace."

Yes, that was it ! This pedantic, new method of judging not only himself but all Italian melodrama was conquering the world. The youth, the best, not merely of Paris, but of his own fatherland were being converted to it.

Oh, it was not vanity, this bitterness that pierced his soul, it was not weakness or envy ! He had drunk his fill of the narcotic of fame which had been poured forth for him more lavishly than for any man. He had had enough, he desired to receive nothing more. But to give he still desired, to pour himself out was a necessity. And he could not !

For ten years, ten of his ripest years, every moment of which had been filled with good-will, he had laboured. And for ten years it had all been vain, pitiful, dead ! Yes, dead ! He was dead, and that man slumbering there, his unsuspecting enemy, had killed him.

Under the fury of this paroxysm the Maestro rose to his feet in the gondola. Undisturbed gleamed the great dome of Wagner's head by the side of his wife, who gazed before her with anxious eyes. And as he stood thus, in the monstrous, all-transforming moonlight, and stared into the boat so close to his own, the thought "So near to my hand" flashed through his mind. Excited as he was, with the words death and murder still in his brain, they entangled themselves with his thought until it seemed to him as if he had said "So near to death," and he sank back horror-stricken and ashamed.

No, there was no hate in him. He gazed at the pale vision of the unconscious Wagner gliding past. Already the enemy seated there before him, the adversary against whom he had wrestled through a hundred sleepless nights, seemed to him the worthiest of foes. Till now, indeed, he had evaded meeting this adversary face to face. His music—the extracts for the piano, the sets of variations, that earnest students had brought to him from time to time, he had put aside after a cursory and uneasy glance. Lohengrin alone he knew completely, from a performance at which he had been present in the King-Emperor's opera-house in Vienna. And on that occasion his doubts had been quelled like the Chimera. He had left the strange theatre feeling himself equal to if not stronger than this man. His melody was clearer, his *ensemble* better arranged, more inspired. Perhaps all his fears were equally unfounded and when he faced the other wonderful works they also would fail to devour him.

Was it true after all that this man had really brought his own work and genius into derision, as in his exaggerated sensitiveness he had so unforgettably and often felt ? Should not one man of genius be great enough to appreciate the greatness of another ?

Half an hour earlier, when in the semi-darkness of the theatre doorway their eyes had met and striven together for a moment, had not the flame in Wagner's gaze been a cry of recognition, a call across all the differences that divided them—accidents of birth, of race, of thought ?—the call "Come !"

"I am Verdi, you are Wagner," these were the words that echoed now in the Maestro's mind, and as they formed themselves in his brain a certainty awoke within him confirming his earlier presentiment. "Not to see the dying Vigna have I been brought to Venice, but to meet this man, Wagner, face to face. God knows why ! We are both old, born in the same year. He dominates and sways all men while I am shy and silent—the timid clodhopper from Roncole. That's the truth of it."

Sharp and glaring, like a lighted *coulisse* against the darker buildings, stood out the façade of the Palazzo Vendramin. The three gondolas landed and the fourth passed on its way indifferently, as if they had not existed. After a while the Maestro asked the gondolier what the time was.

"A quarter past ten, Signor, or a little over. Shall we make for the station ?"

"My train does not go for two and a half hours."

"Oh, the Milan train ?"

"Turn round and take me to San Paolo." He gave the number of a house.

The boatman turned. His fare spread a travelling rug over his knees, for the unnaturally mild December night had become perceptibly frosty.

CHAPTER II

THE CENTENARIAN AND HIS COLLECTION

1

THE man who opened the door to him let the light of a lantern shine into the Maestro's eyes. It was the Senator himself. A cordial, welcoming look overspread his face as he recognized his friend. Silently he put the lantern down, then, grasping his guest's arm, he said:

"The gods do not lie, my Verdi! I felt to-night that you were here."

The warmth of the words, despite their odd, archaic turn, was unmistakable, and the quick, welling affection which they indicated disconcerted the Maestro. The armour of shyness and reserve in which all his emotions were cased, rendered him helpless before any warm and open expression of feeling. Demonstrativeness was pain to him.

How often after the last act of one of his *premières* he had hurried with stumbling steps up to the footlights to face an audience which the distracted opera manager, tearing his hair and rolling his eyes, swore he could no longer restrain, and—while the vocalists crowded round him in ecstasies of triumph—hurried off again with the same embarrassed gait. There was a prima donna who could claim that after the last notes of the great Macbeth scene had died away she had seen tears in Verdi's eyes. He had never forgiven her for it.

And since it was impossible for him to suffer any display of his own emotion, he shrank from the exhibition of weakness or tenderness in those who tried to unlock their hearts to him. Any negative ebullition he could meet, hostility, hate or abuse, but kindness and affection shamed him profoundly. Words were death to him. And so for years he had been misconstrued as cold and hard and haughty.

Verdi gave the Senator's hand a long grip, and tried to mask his embarrassment with somewhat forced banter.

"Well! Since you have deliberately ignored all my invitations and I haven't seen your wicked old face for ten years, there was nothing for it but to come to you myself, my friend."

2

The Senator—he was still called so, though it was many years since he had resigned his office—bore an honoured name among the soldiers of the Risorgimento. Son of a man who had escaped death at the stake only through the fortunate caprice of Francis the First and Antonio Salvotti, the inquisitors, he had for twenty-three years played a part in all the phases of the Revolution from 1835 onwards.

His lifelong weakness for Utopian dreams had led him to become, first, a follower of the visionary priest Gioberti, and later, a pupil of Mazzini, in whom, though only eight years his senior, he had found a loved and honoured master. With Mazzini and Garibaldi he had fought before the gates of emancipated Rome against the French cleric-soldier, Oudinet, whose task it was to bring the flying Pius back from Gaeta to the Lateran.

The brief madness of the Roman Republic he held to be the great period of his life. Later he was one of the few who generously assisted the great social philosopher and patriot to find an asylum in England.

If the Senator did not himself stand in the first rank of Giovane Italia's band of heroes—his character was not strong enough to bear the strain of high political position—he was nevertheless the close friend of the leaders of the movement. More than that, he was the stimulus, the man of thought and enthusiasm who stands indispensable behind every group of political conspirators.

The light of the great epoch had gathered round his name, which stood next to the names of Manin and Enrico Cosenz in the Revolutionary Edict of Venice. Twenty years later, the chief ministers of the state wearied themselves in vain to persuade him to enter their cabinet.

When the union of the nation was accomplished he became a member of the third Roman senate, believing it to be a patriotic duty. For a year he held the office, and then there fell upon him the great disillusionment that overtook all revolutionary democrats under the monarchy, that disappointment of their hopes which all the ardent spirits who had spent themselves in the stormy early years of the century had to experience. After a short ecstasy of triumph, that could not for long blind the republican and Mazzinist Senator to the truth, he handed his seal of office back to Cavona.

The immediate cause of his action was the death of his hero and master who, still unreconciled to the new dispensation, died at Pisa in the same year.

No historical period presents a spectacle of greater injustice to our eyes than that of our grandfathers, the men born in the first two decades of the past century. The pure conception of freedom, the singleness of soul, the vigour and daring and delight in struggle, which marked their attempt to establish a true democracy, are but feebly indicated by the name of 'Liberal' which has since become a term of abuse. The spirit of 1848 has been overpowered by the Romantic spirit, ready to enter into every Holy Alliance, to serve every dubious authority. This spirit of madness—mad, in so far as it refuses to face reality—this demon of a narrow and inflamed imagination, this Narcissus of the mind which is at bottom only a creature of the senses, this god of confusion and unclarity, this lifeless idol of the degenerate worshipped with foolish and forbidden rites, with hypocritical formulas and feverish violence —the evil-working Romantic spirit is the pest of Europe to-day, striking to right and left and destroying the vitality of our youth.

The type of the generation of 1848 was incarnate in Verdi's friend, the Senator. Well grown, corpulent, with projecting sea-blue eyes and full throat, his massive, high-coloured, apoplectic head, with its lion's mane and short beard framing the face, seemed to fill every room that he entered and to attract all the company to him by its magnetic force. And when the sonorous voice boomed out, every sentence ringing melodiously and decisively as out of the depths of a great spirit, all opposition was quelled.

The Senator, who was about the same age as the Maestro, had followed Verdi's career with a voracious interest in music that was almost a monomania. From the early years of his popularity, since Nabucco—the opera that, striking at the heart of the Italian public, had taken it by storm—the Senator had not missed the first night of one of the operas. And no matter how pressing his affairs might be, he would remain in the town to hear it repeated a third and a fourth time. These journeys, which had often to be made by coach, under wretched and inconvenient posting conditions and with much conciliation of Austrian, Roman, or Neapolitan officials, were a true sacrifice at the shrine of music on which more than any other the incense of his life was offered.

In her salon the Countess Maffei used to tell a story according to which, when Corsaro was first produced at Trieste the composer, though in duty and politeness bound to appear, failed to arrive in time, but the Senator was in his place to the minute.

The music of the Maestro has been credited with the power to transport and ravish people who are wholly unmusical. Cavour, for example, the man of reason and master of political intrigue, had not a spark of music in him, yet, in the moment when the news of the successes of 1859 was brought to him,

he threw open his window over the crowded square and, too excited and unstrung to utter a word, sang, in a hoarse, trembling, tuneless voice, the stretto from Trovatore.

The Senator himself was anything but unmusical. For a layman and an Italian of his day his knowledge of music was remarkable. Impelled by an eager desire to produce something that would touch the heart, he had studied theory for a year in very straitened circumstances, under Angelesi, the contrapuntist. And he had worked diligently with Mazzini upon a great work on music, which the patriot had planned. During a month's sojourn in Berlin he had learnt, by the aid of the excellent city orchestra, to understand German symphonization. He played, moreover, on the piano, the flute, and the flugelhorn, and had decided opinions upon the various schools of music.

The French composers repelled him, whether he assayed comic opera or the works of Thomas, Gounod or Massenet. It was the antipathy natural to an earnest, simple nature distrusting charm and sweetness and luxury—he hated *grazioso*.

From the German school of his day he received an impression of inextinguishable sadness. The music lifted him momentarily into an ecstasy of melancholy and plunged him again into the dark, fatal sorrow which no tears could relieve and no pride master.

"Germany is neither cold nor bleak," the Senator had said once to Verdi, "but it always rains there."

And he thought of it always as he had seen it from the Weidendammer bridge where he stood in a despairing mood—a grey land irretrievably sunk in a sea of greyness, a polyphony of grey half-tones, grey sounds, grey apathetic men. It sometimes seemed as if this dreary greyness were killing him.

During one of their conversations—it was at the beginning of the Franco-German war—he had asked the Maestro his opinion of Beethoven's ninth symphony.

Verdi's eyes had blazed as he answered:

"Well, this is how I see it. Even the unwilling must sacrifice to the great gods. There is no help for it. But I keep my head clear. The first three phrases are good. The end is a catastrophe, a desolate, meaningless, howling confusion. An egoist theoretically embracing the multitude. It is in their music that the over-civilized prove themselves to be barbarians."

And after a pause he added:

"The Chamber music is simply an offence."

After music, nearest to his heart, the next place in the Senator's *cor cordium* (as in his love of the classics he called it) was held by the friends and companions of his youth.

It is one of the inscrutable mysteries of human life that our speech, which is our only means of expressing the spiritual, mental and sensual experience we accumulate, is understood clearly and directly only by those who have been born under a star ruled by the same laws as our own. The whole secret of the sterility of art, of all human expression, is locked up in this genetic mystery, and so, too, is the secret that will release its vitality if a time should come when a generation of men shall be born under constellations that are more akin.

Verdi's music was to the Senator like spring water to the thirsty. When it sounded in his ears the colour deepened in his already sanguine face, his eyes grew large and ardent, his lips parted and his breath followed the rhythm in quick agitated jerks, his whole muscular system grew tense and electric with the energy that the music awakened and drew from him. Naturally the influence exerted varied with the manner and nature of the music. To *adagio*, *andante* and *largo* passages, to the lyric, swinging cantabile movements of the Aria or the choral *ensemble* his reaction was quiet and happy. But when the number swelled in tragic, broken strains, or when, storming up the ladder

of the notes, an accelerated *agitato allegro* broke into *prestissimo*, the Senator's breath would swell his chest to bursting-point, like a kettle overcharged with steam, and the mighty tide of his enthusiasm would seize and shake his whole being till it had to find vent in outcry or singing or a wordless, rhythmic movement of the body.

But besides this momentary and overpowering outward effect, every new melody that he seized upon lived within him like some experience that had taken place, not in his conscious existence, but in the cosmic course of his soul through time. The effect of music on his nature was moral as well as vital. The more its influence swayed him, the better able the Senator felt to do his work whether public or private, the deeper and stronger grew his power over the audiences he addressed or the men with whom he conferred.

Health, too, he drew from melody. He had once cured himself of a fever by singing those stormy melodies under his breath for hours on end. He fell into a soothing sleep and while he slept the sickness left him. It had been Verdi's cabalette and stretti which, most of all, had risen in his mind then, and, absurdly as their strange unsanctioned harmonies might read to the musician on the printed page, they had in reality pleased his ear like the mighty unison of a hurricane.

Defending the cabalette and the whole of Verdi's early work, the Senator had once coined this phrase:

"More comes to us by expiration (giving out) than by inspiration (taking in)"—a phrase of noble self-devotion which, had it not been turned to ridicule, might have shaped another destiny for Europe than that which we owe to the victorious Romantics, whose virulent fruit poisons our life to-day.

3

The two men were still standing in the narrow yard of the Venetian house. Both were feeling the constraint familiar to friends who have not seen each other for long, but have in the meantime been much occupied with each other. The franker of the two, the Senator, was the first to shake it off.

"It is really most remarkable, Verdi ! I was sitting up there with my two boys round the table. We were disputing and arguing as we always do. What else is a fortunate father to do when his sons generously give him one of their evenings, but argue with them about culture and Art ? Talking and toasting our shins is all we are good for nowadays. All at once for some reason or other I wanted to bring your name into the discussion. But I didn't do it. Why ? Because I suddenly remembered that I had dreamt about you. And then there came a knock ! You see, dramatically, there came a knock just at that moment ! Italo was going to open, but I stopped him. While I was finding the key and taking a light and coming down the stairs, I knew all the time that it was you who were standing at the gate."

"A good guess at all events ! But it's nearly eleven and I haven't come to keep you from your sleep. I'm going back to Milan with the night train."

The Senator's face fell. The Maestro felt that he must excuse himself.

"I have only been in Venice a few hours, just for the day. I came to visit Vigna, who is dying. It was one of those sudden, uncontrollable impulses that come upon me in these days."

The Senator drew Verdi in.

"Come away ! We must make the most of the hour that you have. What a strange thing !"

Mounting the stairs they entered a large ante-room, which proved that the air of congestion and disrepair in so many Venetian buildings is more apparent than real. Behind these crooked, ruinous fronts there are often concealed huge and splendid rooms, and it strikes us as we enter that our ordinary ideas of proportion are inadequate in this city. The sitting-room, too, was high and spacious, with four great windows looking out over a quiet Rio.

The arrangement of this room did not give the unpleasant impression of a museum which is common in the drawing-rooms of Venetian patricians—a sensation partly due to the fact that all the furniture, the mirrors and the chandeliers, have been inherited from the grand epoch of the city, and partly to the airlessness of those great burial vaults. Although he loved the classics, the Senator hated all collections of antiquities, and Venice, in so far as it is a giant barn in which the harvest of the past is stored, had no attraction for him. He had established himself in his provincial native town chiefly out of resentment against Rome and Milan.

"You see," said he to Verdi, "I don't turn my rooms into second-hand shops by filling them with relics of my ancestors, like the rest of them. Accursed times these ! Our youth to-day is barren. They write poems à la Horace, drama à la Sophocles, paint pictures à la Cinquecento, and make politics à la Byzantium, à la Allah is great. Snobbishness, my dear friend, snobbishness !"

And, in fact, the noble old room was filled with protests against its own character. In the great marble fireplace, that had proved itself to be impracticable, a small iron stove glowed, and on the shelf above, in front of a handsome, useless mirror, there stood a tall oil lamp of openwork design.

Before the window was a grand piano with music piled upon it. The wide dark walls were lined with bookshelves, the contents of which leant against each other in confusion, as if fatigued. On a rack and piled on two small tables stood a number of folio lexicons. In spite of his contempt for the antiquarians, philology was the Senator's favourite study and he pored long over the texts of the classics.

As the two friends entered the room two young men rose from the great centre table, the Senator's sons, Italo and Renzo.

Italo, tall and very thin, was in faultless evening dress, and his clear, self-possessed, aristocratic features wore a supercilious air, as if he regarded all whose footing in society was precarious with supreme indifference. Renzo, named after Manzoni's hero, was somewhat slow and heavy, with eyeglasses nodding aslant on his short nose. This youth of twenty or thereby, whose birth had cost his mother's life, was dressed after the fashion of those Russian and German tribunes of the people who were then taking refuge in Switzerland. He had been studying economic history for a year, under Labriola in Rome, and was now on holidays at his father's house.

The young men straightened themselves with soldierly respect when they recognized the face of their guest, whose bust they had seen often in their father's room. Young men, whose ambition is still unchecked, are thrilled by an emulous excitement when they stand before some distinguished or celebrated man. An almost erotic impulse to distinguish themselves (and to shine in the eyes of some unknown woman) is awakened in their hearts by the sight of one who has already attained all.

"My sons!" announced the Senator in a somewhat discontented tone. Italo and Renzo involuntarily bowed very low, as each gave his hand to the Maestro.

Verdi invariably produced a strong impression upon all who met him, and not on account of his fame alone. It was not a sense of charm or a feeling of admiration, but rather a sort of awe, and this had given rise to the false description of him as "cold" which fame had spread so long. Encountering the far-away gaze of these overarched eyes, which by common consent were described as steely, the onlooker was apt to be seized with uneasy doubts whether he himself was as utterly candid and at one with truth as this man.

The Senator's sons seemed to be disturbed by the impression thus received, for both turned their eyes away. Then, as if fortified by resentment, their still boyish faces changed, and Renzo assumed a look of forced composure, while Italo's air of ironic haughtiness was intensified by impatience.

The four men took their places round the table. The Senator, warmed by his heartfelt pleasure, was entirely happy and proud. His delight would at that

moment have been capable of overflowing in many, even excessive, tokens of goodwill, had he not been checked by his friend's more restrained manner and by the consciousness that his love was not returned with the same fervour as it was poured forth.

A footman appeared in the doorway with an inquiring look.

"The Santo, bring my Santo !"

When the sparkling, dark golden wine stood on the table in the glasses, the Senator began to enlarge at great length upon the growth, cultivation and management of this excellently matured vintage. The subject drew out the Maestro to descant upon a Bordeaux vine which he had planted at Saint Agatha, and to describe how in the course of his many sojournings in France he had picked up enough information about the handling of red wine to enable him to produce from his own cellar a beverage which would bear comparison with the best Bordeaux for, unlike the Italian plants, his vine improved with age.

During this conversation the two older men hardly gave the impression of old comrades, but rather of two burly farmers sitting after the market in the inn of some country town discussing their crops, the weather and their buying and selling, together.

"But you must smoke !"

The Senator drew forward a box which he unlocked after a hurried search for the key. This brought something like eagerness for a moment into the Maestro's face. He smelled and examined the collection of Henry Clays, Upmans, Bocks, Rogers, and Carvayals; long, knotty cigars with the end cut off short, and thick ones with pointed ends, that lay packed in silver foil, some encircled with broad and some with narrow bands.

The aromatic, masculine smell of American tobacco spread round them. The Senator specially prized one brand that had been sent to him by a former officer in the Southern army. As the two men pulled steadily at their big green-mottled cigars, the smoke rose to the dusky ceiling like a satisfying harmony.

"You with your silly cigarettes—" said the Senator to his sons with a groan or their effeminacy.

"I do not smoke, father," protested Renzo, in a slightly dogmatic tone. He had drunk no wine either.

The Maestro observed the young men and then addressed father and sons thus :

"I am sorry, gentlemen, that I have interrupted your interesting conversation. . . ."

"Folly! I say, nothing but folly. . . ."

After this mysterious outburst the Senator wiped his forehead which had grown moist with excitement.

Verdi glanced at him questioningly.

"Nothing but folly! You know me. God knows I am no *laudator temporis acti !* But here we are on the mountain top pointing our children to the promised land. Yes. Many thanks we get! They come down again on the same side. In my days I have known men like Pallavicino who sent the trumpery gilt Annunciata Order back to Victor Immanuel, the traitor's son. And he was an old man. But the young men of to-day! What are all their extravagant, dynamite-laden schemes and speeches worth? What can be done with a crowd of vulgar self-seekers, their snouts in yesterday's dirt, searching for the day before yesterday's corn ? My dear Verdi . . ."

The Senator broke off, choking.

"It seems to me, Verdi, that we, with all our patriotic morality and idealism, have become mere phrase-makers, and that the power of the old trading times really rested on better foundations than that of to-day. This realism . . ."

Ashamed at having been carried away and having failed to make his meaning clear, the Senator struck the table and repeated with disgust, "This realism," as if with that harmless and indefinite phrase to nail all opposition to the table.

Renzo looked at his father and seemed to be trying to suppress the undutiful

remarks he was making below his breath. Italo, disdaining to show annoyance, made an impertinent bow towards the Senator.

Verdi turned to his friend with a faint smile of protest as to one who set justice above everything:

"Between us, you and I have known more phrase-makers and *poseurs* than honest men. But there were still a few left. It is the same to-day as it was in our time and always will be."

Italo made a very graceful motion of the head towards the Maestro. His voice sounded a little timid.

"Thank you, Signor Maestro! Papa's philippics always make me sick."

Like most impulsive men, the Senator had sometimes cause to regret having been betrayed into an injustice. But just because he was penitent his words became still more excited and confused.

"Oh, you!" He did not look at Italo. "Your A and Z is that the Spanish Pretender should receive you graciously in his palace, and that the whole crew from Mocenigo, Morosini, Albrizzi, Balbi, Colalto should find you charming."

Italo possessed the priceless faculty of being angry quietly, and he was able to say without any sign of resentment,

"Papa ! Why should that set of people be worse than any other set ?"

But though he said no more, he reddened on account of the Maestro's presence. Renzo now broke into the conversation.

"We were engaged in an abstract argument, father. Why these personalities ?"

Verdi mutely indicated that for once he, too, preferred abstract subjects. Renzo struck an attitude.

"The question we were discussing was whether Art as it inheres in the human race must have an object, or whether it can be conceived to exist independently of any object. No, 'object' is not the word—a meaning, a direction . . ." The young theorist stuttered in his embarrassment. "Is a listener necessary to the existence of a work of dramatic or musical Art ? Or has the work of Art an independent existence . . . ?"

The Senator sprang to his feet crying, "And I tell you, a work of Art has one sole and only aim and that is to make men better and greater. Anything else is not a work of Art at all, but a worthless and unhealthy excretion."

Like Italo, Renzo opposed to his father's heat a sort of sarcastic respectfulness. With the infallible air of a boy who has just mastered an imposing terminology, he replied to the Senator's outburst,

"For my part, my standpoint is that each man is part of the universal social-economic life of humanity and cannot exist for himself alone. 'The hands of the clock are useless without the dial' as the proverb says."

"Oh, you and your Labriola and your Marx !"

The Senator sat down again.

"Maestro! you must settle this point for us."

Verdi hated such "Art talk" like the devil. Nevertheless, the wrinkles round his eyes screwed themselves again into a smile.

"I doubt whether my verdict has any value, for it is a long time now since I have done anything that would be called a work of Art. But as a farmer and a landowner, if you want my opinion, I should say that everything that the earth brings forth, springs and grows, not for itself, but in order that it may become food and fodder."

"And the flowers, Maestro ?"

Italo's interjection was perfectly justified. But the Senator did not stop to think of justice, he felt it necessary to contradict his eldest son immediately, no matter what he said.

"Flowers, flowers ! A fine flower, your Wagner!"

The name was spoken. Although it could be definitely traced neither to the Maestro nor the unsuspecting youths nor their father a perceptible sense of embarrassment reigned for a moment. The Senator, who was

unfortunate in his expressions to-day, as so often happened when he was deeply moved, tried to correct the slip he had made.

"Italo, you must know, is a fiddler. He has been playing Wagner's Youth symphony to-day. People are making a craze of his music. If you go to the Piazza at midday to get a little sunshine and drink a vermouth at Floriani's or Quadri's you hear nothing else among the fine folk. Wagner here, Wagner there. Ah, bah!"

Italo's usually too-complacent manner changed completely, and into his eyes came the ecstatic light which the Maestro had already noted in the faces of the youths at La Fenice; he turned to the visitor, his hand on his heart.

"You know Richard Wagner, Maestro?"

"I do not. I know very few people."

"A pity! A pity!" The young man's eyes mused for a moment. "But his music, his immortal music, you must know and love."

The Senator laughed.

Verdi grew ice-cold, and then, as if the questioner were too insignificant to be answered directly, he turned to an imaginary audience to make his statement.

"Of Wagner's music I know Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, of his later work only a few fragments. We are Italians. The principle of our music is radically different from that of German music, which rests upon the tempered instruments as they are called, such as the piano and the organ, and upon the abstract, almost purely mental note. Italian music, our own, rests upon the free flow of melody, upon the vocalist. We have to decide to which of these we belong."

These words, low and quietly as they were spoken, were uttered with such precision, were so plainly the outcome of long and careful thought, of much effort and questioning and conviction, that they seemed like a public utterance, too challenging and embarrassing to be spoken in a private room.

The Senator was glad, therefore, when the young servant entered saying:

"The Marchese has just returned from the theatre."

"The Marchese returns from the theatre every night. Where were they playing to-night?"

"In the Rossini theatre."

The servant did not retire and his master looked at him inquiringly.

"What else?"

"The Marchese wishes to speak to you."

"Oh, that's a great, a rare honour! Go, Renzo. That is . . ."

The Senator looked at Verdi.

"If you are agreeable, that is . . ."

The Maestro looked at the time.

"Which Marchese is this?"

"Our landlord. The old eccentric, Gritti."

"Gritti? Gritti? What? The famous centenarian?"

"The centenarian! An example for us both, Verdi."

"What? That legend, that myth of the eighteenth century, is your landlord?"

"Yes, this house belongs to him; he has fitted it up as if it were a theatre. It's more than sixty-five years since he had it built."

"Gritti? Gritti? Isn't that the man who has gone to the theatre every day since 1790? Or perhaps it was 1690, the devil knows? A spectre . . ."

"He won't spare you the date."

"I knew him first"—the Maestro paused a moment—"in Petersburg. That is perhaps twenty-five years ago. He was the ambassador of the Papal States and he sat in a box in the Marien theatre every evening. He did not look his age, then; his hair and beard were black with blue lights in them."

"He has found out that you are in the house and wants to show you his treasures. They are original."

A high voice became audible outside, in which was recognizable the peculiar nonchalant drawl of the man of the world who knows how, by his lofty and insolent manner, to suppress and silence all contradiction. This voice was using a language that, although pure Italian, resembled Volapuk in being characterized by a careful avoidance of all purely national turns and inflexions—the language by which the diplomatic world is wont to distinguish itself from all others.

So positive and compelling was the impression produced by the voice that all eyes were fixed on the door, which opened slowly, admitting to the ante-room outside a beam of light in which the amused face of Renzo and a white-haired servant in livery were visible.

In a perfectly new and fashionable dress coat, the white-swelling shirt front glittering and betraying neither by line nor wrinkle any hint of the life that beat within it, in long, pointed Paris shoes that seemed to shine on lasts rather than human feet, there came into the circle of light the automaton of a *grand seigneur*. From the right shoulder a pair of eyeglasses hung motionless on their ribbon. One white-gloved hand rested on the top of a curious, old-world cane. The other hand was ungloved and betrayed the only visible sign of life, and that because it so plainly showed the mark of approaching death. It hung down from the round cuff that slipped over three-quarters of its length like a soft, little, brown, shrivelled-up animal. The skin of the head, on which neither hair nor down had grown for long, was perfectly free from wrinkles and shone, not clearly like a mirror, but as if polished with an iron.

There was something characterless and empty in the features that were neither young nor old, neither alive nor dead—something inhuman and unreal. Lips there were none, but in a moving gap there shone a row of white and angry teeth. The arched scaffolding of a nose jutted out, which, broken in the middle, hung awry at an obtuse angle. But the lidless, red-rimmed, bird-like eyes had the quick, darting life of a sick animal. The shrunken neck no longer measured a dozen inches round. Long, brown and flaccid hung the wrinkled purses of skin, and at every breath the absurdly exaggerated Adam's apple jutted out. As a mechanic gauges the energy of a machine by the steady beating of the piston, so the observer could watch in this working throat the only manifestation of life.

The Marchese's eyes had now become accustomed to the light. Without letting his gaze rest on anyone present he raised, with a graceful motion, both the bare little corpse and the gloved hand to his lips and graciously kissed his thumbs. This gesture had become fashionable as the sign of a transport of pleasure at the time of the Vienna Congress.

He bent his polished head low, and the clear detached voice that hardly seemed to issue from him said:

"I congratulate myself on meeting so great an artist."

4

Andrea Geminiano Maria Arcangelo Leone Gritti was, or called himself, a descendant of the not altogether unknown Doge of the same name who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, acquired some reputation in Venetian music, sculpture and fine art. It was this regent—whose tomb in San Francesco della Vigna the eager tourist can, at the bidding of Baedeker, still admire to-day—who called Sansovin, the builder of the giant stairway, to his service, bestowing on him the commission to build the Library, the Loggietta, and other noble buildings. One can read, further, in Fétis, Gevaert, and other historians of music that this Doge favoured and assisted Adriano Vigliarte, the founder and master of the Venetian school of music and the composer of the celebrated vespers of San Marco. For the numerous and beautiful compositions of this master in Motet, Madrigal and Frottola, for his brilliant series of songs,

and his antiphonic symphonies there was coined by his contemporaries the beautiful phrase which describes them as *aurum potabile*, a golden draught.

The Marchese Gritti boasted of his descent from a line of Doges, who were the parents and promoters of music, and his claim seemed to be justified by his own musical interests. But he never mentioned the famous poetess Cornelia Gritti, of the house of Barbaro, who also found a place in his family tree, for he held literature in mild contempt.

The Marchese gave 1778 as the year of his birth, and accordingly his age must have been a hundred and four. But—so strange are the pitfalls that beset vanity, so inscrutable the ways of man in search of honour—the Marchese made himself older than he was. Actually born in 1781, he was only a hundred and one!

He had but two passions left, and one of these was the passion for being old and growing steadily older. It was not that life had any value or interest for him now, but because every added day was an added honour.

Long escaped from the net of human activities, free from the chains of daily life, without relations, friends or children, lonely in an utter, unrealizable sense, life was for him only a sort of exercise or sport at which he was making a record, daily breaking it gloriously amid the empty applause of unseen spectators. As if he were an artist or an inventor who had accomplished some great feat, he went swelling through the streets because he was a hundred years old. Every time he went abroad he enjoyed this satisfaction which he would not have exchanged for the joy of a youth enraptured by the shy greeting of a mistress.

Every day, punctually at twelve, he appeared upon the Piazza, his haughty, rigid steps attended by the man-servant who, only seventy-five and the picture of hopeless decrepitude, served as jester at his court. Three times he would stalk round the square, taking up his stand here and there to receive the homage which he implicitly claimed for the genius that had enabled him to cheat the laws of nature for another day.

When from the reddened lips of a lovely Princess or still lovelier Countess there fell the familiar flattering cries of "Why, it's a man of fifty!" "Fifty? More like thirty!" he felt the triumph of the jockey who gallops in the winner on the field of Longchamps under the furious applause of a roaring crowd. It gave him an unfailing thrill of pride to watch decay creeping over the fading faces on which deepening lines defied the rouge, and attacking the matronly figures in their flowing, bugle-trimmed finery. Women were no longer women to him but creatures without grace or talent against whom to wage war. For youth, the war of the sexes is all too surely ordained by the laws of nature. But he, on his pinnacle of eccentricity, carried the campaign into age.

There were moments when this war against Nature, or rather the pride of victory, took strange, demoniacal shapes. In honour of his supposed hundredth birthday the Syndicate of the State of Venice had given a banquet in the Sala Bonaparte. This feast should have been a great event if, according to the law of progression, the enthusiasm had risen in proportion to the generous provision made by the town, but the evening ended in fact with an incredible scandal.

The banquet was over and the company in a happily exalted mood. A young officer stood up and in a sprightly speech complimented Gritti, challenging him to invite the assembled company to a return banquet on his hundred and tenth birthday. The Marchese rose and gave the invitation to this prospective feast in dead earnest as if the possibility that he would not be able to entertain guests in ten years' time did not exist.

The centenarian's words were spoken with such assurance, and indicated such an obviously blasphemous state of mind, that a sudden silence fell on the room. The Cardinal and Patriarch by whom Gritti sat at table was, as a good Catholic, visibly shocked, and turning quietly to his neighbour he reproved the unseemliness of his speech. This only enraged the aged Gritti who, in spite of his conventional clericalism, could not tolerate the suggestion that his length of days was due to the grace of God and not to his own powers. In sharp, cutting tones he uttered his challenge.

"I will wager this young man all that I have and hold against a thousand francs that on the fifteenth of January, 1891, I will entertain every one here at my table provided only that they shall then be able and willing to accept my invitation."

Upon this the Patriarch and all the men of authority in the city left the room without further ceremony, followed by the greater part of the company, leaving Gritti with a swarm of revellers who renewed their toasts to him with doubled and tenfold enthusiasm.

True, the devout Marchese confessed and did penance the next day. But the bet still stood and he had not lost it yet. The boycott of the official circle was raised on the first excuse, and it became more firmly established than ever that a centenarian is sacrosanct and stands outside all laws of good taste and behaviour.

The admiration of his followers rose still higher and the respect in which he was held was enormously increased when the young man against whom the bet had been laid died of an acute illness on the eve of the fifteenth of January a year later. The following day Gritti showed himself on the streets and in the square at all hours and it needed but little to bring the people to cross themselves before him as victor over more than earthly powers.

Thus, his monstrous determination to outface nature was one of the elements of his life, and he knew with the precision of an expert just what he could do and how to spare himself in order to economize his strength. His mechanism must be understood and cared for as a fine and costly instrument is tended. The essential thing was a carefully thought out minimum of nourishment by which the irreplaceable apparatus for flesh and blood making should never be overtaxed, hardly even taxed at all. The balance between rest and movement was struck with an exact instinct. All the thoughts, even the vaguest workings of the mind, were watched, for the Marchese knew that the mental no less than the physical life is a process of decay, a tending towards death.

But every evening between eight and nine o'clock this mechanism fell into the control of an opposing, countermanding force, establishing once more the truth that no being in the world can escape the struggle between the powers of good and evil. The Marchese had secretly resolved in the deepest earnest to live till he was two hundred and over. Since death, before it overtakes us, is only an experience that has befallen others, why should not the Marchese Gritti hold the conviction that the conditions in his case were entirely different from those of other men, A true nobleman bows before nothing, least of all before an argument from analogy. Certainly no one can prevent the truly great from entertaining great projects, and in the moments when the centenarian indulged his sense of self-sufficiency, all the great men of history from Hannibal to Bonaparte became as mere molehills before him.

He had every motion of his being under control except one, which overpowered him every evening between eight and nine. It was the desire to do something that he had done daily since his twentieth year; night after night, without interruption, he had attended the theatre.

At one time he had hesitated whether or not to allow this destructive impulse to set up an obstacle to his great project of living two hundred years. But the wiser counsel had prevailed, namely, that the conquering of this impulse would cost more of his life capital than its indulgence.

When the season in Venice was over Gritti travelled elsewhere, wherever opera was being played, for by some unseen agency the managers kept him informed of their repertoire. He had found, too, that railway travelling did him good, if the dose were duly measured and properly administered. So he spent the summer and autumn in brilliant, and, for him, remote places like Ostend, Sebastian, Monte Carlo, Wiesbaden and Paris, but always and only places in which there was an opera house.

This habit of sitting every evening in a box at the theatre was at first only one of the ordinary pleasures of his rank and station, but later it became a mysterious necessity, as drugs become necessary for the nerves. It was only opera that

attracted him. The Marchese had gone to the theatre twenty-nine thousand three hundred and eighty-seven times, and had heard nine hundred and seventy-one separate works, only seven of which were comedy or tragedy.

It might almost be said that Gritti knew every opera house in Europe, for in his diplomatic career he had travelled widely. He had been in the service of several of the Italian states. As the rule in human affairs is, he had risen by virtue of his birth rather than any personal quality, and from being Attaché became successively Secretary of Legation, Consul, Minister Plenipotentiary and, finally, Ambassador. Beginning in the service of Modena, he went on to that of Napoleon the First, to whom he was personally known; cashiered after his downfall, Gritti subsequently became foreign ambassador of Parma, Tuscany, and Naples, and after several sojourns in Germany, Paris, and Spain, ended at last in St. Petersburg as deputy of a reigning Elector. Political history ignores the Marchese Gritti entirely. For him the diplomatic service was only the necessary means of attaining the position proper to a man of his rank. All he had done was to move year after year, through the sometimes dull, sometimes stirring, precincts of ambassadorial palaces in Dresden, Hanover, Paris, Madrid, and Petersburg.

His real history lay in the twenty-nine thousand evenings when he had entered the red and gold theatre in full consciousness of his perfect clothes and perfect breeding. He could never tire of the thrilling moment in which through all the changing modes of a hundred years he beheld the bare or veiled shoulders of the ladies in the boxes gleam in the light, while the orchestra tuned their instruments with hideous, exhilarating discords. Still less could he forget the smell of the dust-laden air of the green-room, when he stood among all the costumed, rouged, and strangely lovely creatures of the stage like a curious traveller in a troop of natives. The charm of a wild and brief embrace was long forgotten, but not the scent of the dressing-room where it was enjoyed.

What a sea of music lay behind the Marchese ! He had known them all, the composers who, chiselled in marble, had long turned upon the spectator a pathetic, thought-worn look that they never wore in life. Him, the man of rank, they had been sadly inclined to meet with sedulous bows, proud of the *caro amico* of his comradeship.

He would live on though his life had no charm for him, though it rustled, sucked dry, in emptiness around him, if only to spite his enemy death, whose chief significance lay in its opposition to his project.

This mummy life held a second passion—his love for that other, fairer world which, evening after evening, mysteriously called him.

Once when it was already close upon the hour at which he must begin with painful care to dress for the opera, his servant, the messenger of death, came to him with starting eyes.

"Excellency! Your illustrious brother . . ."

Quickly the Marchese interrupted him.

"Not now! Bring me the news to-morrow."

And he went to the theatre.

The most interesting product of this passion was the centenarian's collection which, partly dispersed and partly destroyed by fire, has unfortunately not come down to us.

The Senator was right. Gritti, enraptured at having the famous Maestro for his victim, was eager to display his treasures.

5

Before the Marchese with his rigid automaton's step appeared in the room a sense of good fellowship had reigned in spite of the dispute upon which the Senator, in his excitement over the visit of his friend, had entered.

The presence of the cententarian changed everything. The weird influence

of the old man was not confined to his strange appearance, it spread like a breath of death around everyone whom he approached, and every other personality paled before it. Disdaining the seat that was at once offered to him, he stood motionless, leaning upon his stick; only the darting eyes and the moving throat gave any sign of human life in him. Verdi, who, like all men of distinguished nature, prized modesty and hated arrogance, had risen and stood staring dumbly at the strange figure. The Senator, who hardly saw his landlord once in a year, also stood silent, perplexed and embarrassed by the unnatural effect which his presence produced. Renzo tried to regard only the grotesqueness of the apparition, but there was something hostile in his concealed amusement. Italo's handsome face could not dissemble his horror and disgust. Whenever he saw the Marchese, his gorge rose and he felt he must fly from the spot.

Gritti, or rather the clear voice that, unlike human voices, had no vibrations peculiar to itself, began to speak.

Our speech, in the course of the few score years that we call our life, undergoes changes that are unremarked. Men to-day do not speak as they spoke in our childhood, and it is not merely specialized or technical expressions that, like out-of-date machinery, have been laid aside. By secret workings and windings and turnings words themselves change their form. Only after one of the natural sections into which history falls is completed can we look back and clearly recognize the alteration. The Marchese's method of expression had at a given moment ceased, like the cellular tissues of his body, to be affected by the action of life. And this arresting of his development must have taken place at a very early date, for his speech was such as was already outworn in Verdi's and the Senator's childhood, and they both failed to recollect ever having heard one of the idioms that he used. That particular one may, perhaps, have dated from the eighteenth century.

The Marchese turned to Verdi, still addressing him in the third person.

"I have already had the honour of making the acquaintance of the Maestro. In a few days I shall be a hundred and five years old. The recollection is quite clear. Only the time and place escape me. May I beg for assistance?"

Quickly and curtly Verdi named Petersburg. The unmodulated voice took up the thread.

"Russia! The Russians! I know them. They are a lovable people. They understand our lyric art well. Here it is no longer understood. They used to call me Andrei Gemianovich. Think of it! 'Andrei.' Poor souls!"

After these words, although not the slightest change was visible in the face, the voice broke into a sort of slow laugh.

"My father's name was Gemiano. He was born in the year 1740. And I, his son, am alive to-day."

To the Senator's question which opera the Marchese had heard that night, the old man answered vaguely,

"It was music."

Then he turned to the manservant behind him, who, unlike his master, was subject to mortal decay, and showed the infirmity of age.

"François! Is it noted?"

The servant showed a page in the notebook which he held in his hand.

"Yes, excellency."

"The number."

"29388."

"The hearing of the work?"

"The twenty-third."

"The object?"

François held out a large, carefully rolled theatre programme.

"Register! Archive! Thanks!"

The servant bowed.

The lidless eyes turned on the Maestro.

"Cimarosa was my friend! The Neapolitans are unsurpassed. They have the *flebile dolcezza.*"

These words—"the joy of tears," "tearful sweetness," that were being used everywhere in speaking of music—sounded horrible in the mouth of this creature to whom both tears and joy were more alien than to a corpse.

Renzo, after the manner of children who dare not laugh at their elders, sniggered in his handkerchief. The toneless voice went on:

"*Flebile dolcezza*—feeling. The privilege of my hundred and five years—I dare to speak the truth. What is it to me what they feel?"

And for the first time expression came into the voice, an expression of superlative cruelty.

"What is it to me what men feel? The *Maestro filosofo.* I know. Too modern: that is the mistake."

"*Maestro filosofo*" was the name that had been given to Verdi at the beginning of his career, because then his work, compared with the contemporary Italian virtuoso opera, appeared too harsh and deep. It was strange to hear that epithet again after so many years, now that the world had come to regard his music as too commonplace and obvious. How short-lived is public opinion! Here stood one who turned him into a youth again, a struggling beginner. He smiled at the "too modern" of the ancient creature who now gave the signal to move on.

"If it pleases the celebrated Maestro, we shall proceed to the inspection."

As they were leaving the room, the Senator took his friend by the arm.

"Oh, I am so vexed, so vexed! There was only time for a little talk, and now comes this old fool! But it's always the same when any pleasure comes my way! I always contrive with the help of fate to make a mess of everything."

Verdi said nothing. The whole day had been so extraordinary that he, usually so exact, had forgotten the approach of midnight and that he had only an hour left.

It is a very convenient feature of Venetian palaces that the different occupants have their own separate entrances. The company now followed François to the Marchese's gallery, not down the dark and narrow flight of steps by which the Maestro had entered, but by the glittering main staircase of the house. On the landing between the two doors that led to the galleries stood a tall mirror before which the centenarian, who had mounted the stairs without any strain to either heart or limbs, paused as if to assure himself with satisfaction—"I am still in the flesh."

Italo, who usually took advantage of every mirror that offered, passed this one with averted head, as if he feared that his reflection might touch that of the ancient. The contact would have been as loathsome to him as a bath that had been fouled.

Meanwhile two servants had set the great candlesticks in the hall through which the way led ablaze with light. The doors were thrown open and the Marchese's curious museum lay before his guests in a rosy haze.

The first room had the appearance of an unusually fine toyshop in which nothing was exhibited for sale but remarkably large puppet-theatres. Fashioned by delicate hands and hung with brocade, ravishing, life-like models of the Communal Theatres of Venice, past and present, now met the view. The models showed the inner and outer architecture, the auditorium and the stage complete, either the ceiling or the façade being hinged to open. It was a sight to delight the heart of any child or dramatic enthusiast. In the warm light of the room, now humanized by the unwonted visitors, the Marchese began his explanation His voice even gained some intonation. With his stick he pointed out upon the models the older theatres which in the course of time have almost all been destroyed by fire: San Cassiano, San Samuel or Grimani, San Margherita, San Girolano, San Paolo e Giovanni, San Moisé, all built between 1630 and 1700. Out of the fen of the lagoons dozens of theatres, as of churches, had sprung,

spacious playhouses and places of entertainment in which, as in mirrors, the festive genius of the people was reflected, their harmoniousness, their beauty, their boldness, their animalism and their lovableness.

In the middle of the room a Marionette stage was erected in which with the ancient Pantaloon, with Peterkin the jolly servant, the lovers, the boastful ship captain, the stupid burgomaster, and a choir of Sabbatarian Jews, the final scene of the puppet-comedy was set forth—the epoch-marking invention of Orazio Becchi who, more than three hundred years before, had laid the foundations upon which comic opera was built. The Marionette lover was placed right on the footlights and, bending forward, presented an unrolled parchment which was fastened to his arm. On it Verdi could read in old-world script :—

"E voi cortesi ed illustri spettatori
Ci date veramente
Piacevol segno, che vi sia piaciuta
Questa favola nostra, poi che s'ode.
Grand applauso, voci di lode."

"How far," thought the Maestro, "has the comedy of to-day travelled from its beginnings there—the result of this accursed, affected, lying thing called Art. Art, like everything sacred, is only art when it is unconscious of itself. In my youth the speaking of the words of an opera was a thing in which there was very little art. But to-day the dancer on the rope is not content to be a rope-dancer. To-day everything must be written in precise form, written for piano-players, musical critics, students and æsthetic asses. Liszt has said that a new work in which there are not at least three hitherto unknown combinations of notes is worthless. Ah, we were unlettered, perhaps, but now there are only alphabets—nothing but alphabets."

Verdi smiled in spite of his gloom at the word "alphabets" which had come into his mind. They had passed through several rooms on the walls of which hung the portraits of thousands of singers, men and women. The former idols of the evening city—friends of the Marchese, who had intoxicated the bel-canto-mad crowd with their flowing roulades, their *ad lib.* cadenzas and final bravouras, their cunning in the use of register, Marcati, Morendi, Fermaten—now hung there mute and impotent in lithograph and engraving. There were but few photographs. Most of the pictures bore a dedication or inscription in bold characters, sprawling often over the body of the portrait.

With forced smiles of unvarying charm and eyes that beamed or sparkled, shone those faces that had once awakened worship, ecstasy and despair in kings and journalists—Grisi, Persiani, Pasta, Malibran, Bellutti, Pacchiorotti, and Colbran, Rossini's companion. The faces of the men in this mausoleum of vanity wore a more conscious look of inspiration: Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, Nourrit, Doncelli, Lavasseur, Dordogae, down to Tamberlik and Graziani, each of them a man who to the Parisians of his day had been greater than Bonaparte.

Through two rooms devoted to the ballet they passed on to the chambers of the composers, where busts of the Maestri stood and signed pages of music were spread out in showcases. One room was entirely devoted to the younger Neapolitan school. In golden letters under the heads that he passed one after another, Verdi read names but few of which were known to him. Who were they all now—Anfossi, Giordano, Gardi, Gazzaniga, Astaritta, Zingarelli, Marinelli, Capua and Palma? Was not their fame even more dead, more mouldering than that of the singers? Celebrated, adored, laurel-crowned masters! To what end was all this vanity of creation, that last illusion which is so hard to lay?

'*Was ist richtig, was ist wichtig?*' the lines rang clearly through his head. '*Nur für dich, nur für dich!*'* came the answer. Once he had said, "Thus have I

* "What is worthy, what is fitting?
But for thee, but for thee."

written and must die." But other words rose now. "Thus have I written. To-day or to-morrow I must die. And all that I have done is worthless to me to-day. It is nothing. I lay it by. Like a youth of twenty I must begin my first work. And it grows late !"

In the next room the Marchese, who became less and less of an automaton among his treasures, called Verdi's attention to the bust of Simone Mayr.

"As the Maestro will know, this great composer was a German. But he possessed, in spite of that, the true art of song."

The last bust was that of Vincento Bellini of Catania. With a truly fatherly gesture the ancient laid his hand upon the head of the statue:

"This child was the last, this blessed child."

Seized again by his fixed idea he added:

"I was twenty-one years older than he and he has been dead for nearly fifty years."

And then:

"Young gentlemen all, what sort of music is that to which a listener is necessary ?"

Another door opened. A breath of colder air blew into the faces of the company, laden with a heavier odour of dust, of burning wax and of decay. The Maestro saw a long room stretching before him, in which, it seemed to him, myriads of burning candles danced and flickered.

It was the kernel of the collection. Here hung the original theatre programmes of the thousand separate works which the centenarian had heard in his thirty thousand attendances at the theatre. They hung in many sizes, shapes and colours, framed and glazed, not only on the walls of the apartment but also on the screens and partitions which divided this extraordinary room.

The thin voice of the Marchese began to speak.

But the Maestro, suddenly oblivious, heard nothing. A rising dizziness seized him, and in an effort to master it he bent to look at the nearest theatre programme.

He read a date, the name of a town, and under them:—

Prima rappresentazione
di melodrama:
IL DILUVIO UNIVERSALE
di celebre maestro
G. DONIZETTI.

He would not raise his eyes from the sheet, for he felt that something nameless threatened him, and he could do nothing to withstand it. Horror paralysed him as he saw the flame of a candle seizing on the wood of one of the frames and felt that in a second this world of paper would be in flames. A crackling explosion ! Devouring flames, horrible heat, clouds of black smoke, a deathly stench, suffocation !

With a short, hardly intelligible call to the Senator, Verdi left the hall; he was very pale as he sought with hurried steps to find the way out of the gallery, while the others gazed with astonishment after the two men.

The vision of flames which came to the Maestro so powerfully and distinctly was actually, as it proved, a prophetic warning.

6

The Maestro would not be persuaded to remain longer. He stood on the water-worn steps, ready to enter his gondola, and the Senator, accompanying him, leant down to say:

"We have not been very cheerful together, my Verdi." There were tears in the kind eyes but in the darkness his friend saw nothing. "That chimerical old creature and his damned gallery!"

"It was nothing," said Verdi repressively; "but at my age, and when there is nothing to be gained by it, a man must not overtire himself. My friend, I have a great longing for the spring in my fields again, where the work will soon be starting, and for my quiet cattle. Cities oppress me more and more. Down there, in my house, in the stables, among the farmers on market days, I am what I was meant to be. I never ought to have been anything else."

The Senator pressed his friend's hand.

"Verdi! If for one day only I could be Verdi!"

"I don't advise you. What am I? The miserable possessor of an empty reputation, from which all reality has long passed. For ten years I have been no longer a composer without, unhappily, becoming a real farmer either."

As if in this outburst he had betrayed himself too far, Verdi quickly took his leave. The gondola disappeared into the darkness, for the moon had now set and the winter night had turned a little cold.

The Senator went back to his two sons in his own room. Renzo was reading and Italo moving impatiently about. The father said, in the manner of one who coins an apothegm:

"That is the greatest man of our time because he is the sincerest. Did you feel that?"

No one answered the question. Italo did not wish to provoke his father, but neither the tunes of Trovatore nor the sentiment of Traviata were to his taste. And Renzo, utterly unmusical, was thinking of Rome and a girl there.

Tears came readily to the Senator and more readily as he advanced in years. His eyes were still wet from the parting and his thoughts refused to leave Verdi.

"When one thinks how this sun has set! How little we know! People came from everywhere to hear his music——"

Italo knew that now the history of the first night of Nabucco would follow and he had already heard it to satiety. Quickly he found an excuse for interrupting, saying in the soft, rather appealing voice suitable to a young man who informs his father after midnight that he must go and visit a friend:

"Papa! Excuse me, if I go now. I have an appointment with Pilade."

"Well! Well! Go to your Pilade, my boy!"

The old man did not inquire into his son's doings. He knew that Italo seldom slept in the house but took no notice. Italo quickly disappeared. Renzo took his book and said good-night also.

Left alone, the Senator's face flushed as he choked down his emotion. He went to the bookshelves and turned some of his folios over aimlessly. Then, leaving them in disorder, he returned to the table and lit a fresh cigar. Presently his broad, temperamental face grew cheerful again. With a sense of contentment he puffed out the smoke and his voice was deep with undefined pleasure as, hardly knowing himself why the words came, he quoted the line,

"*Exsurgat aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor.*"

His exhibition abruptly cut short, the Marchese Andrea Gritti quickly consoled himself with the explanation that a sudden indisposition had overtaken the great Maestro. It always pleased and cheered him when men younger than himself showed signs of the weakness of age. Every death in the circle of his acquaintances confirmed him in his determination to live.

François had prepared everything for the night in a small warmed chamber. The Marchese did not lie down in bed; lying down was the position of the vanquished, of self-surrender.

Lying, he might more easily be surprised by the end, and he meant to be always on his guard. The centenarian took his place in a large armchair. Moreover, for ten years he had not indulged in what men call sleep. Like the fakirs and Yogis he knew how, without sleeping (for even sleep is wearing in many ways), to suspend life.

He sat stiffly there, his brain receiving no impression except perhaps of the cloud pictures of dawn, his breath coming slowly and heavily and his eyes only half closed. On a mattress in the room a comely seventeen-year-old servant lad lay on duty. If Gritti did not follow the sound household customs of the Bible so far as, like David, to warm his aged, ice-cold body by means of an Abigail, yet he believed that fresh young life near him to be a safeguard.

Italo left the house through a door that opened on the church square. The slightly sarcastic and self-conscious expression had disappeared from his face. He breathed quickly as if in strong excitement. He was half an hour late and much might have happened. But what sensation of danger, even of death, does not youth in its secret heart covet, even while it fears? Italo drew a cloak over his black coat and set out running madly. He raced through the silent darkness, over the many-staired bridges, past churches that with their outspread towers hovered like birds of passage over the motionless night of the *campi*. He ran, as one only runs by night, without pause or fatigue, poised like a bird, through the narrowed limits of the town. He met no more than three beings, and these, muttering furiously to themselves, hardly belonged to the human race.

Many years after, when he had long been snared in life's giant net of necessity, Italo recalled this midnight race, with its ardour and exuberance, as the moment when he had tasted the joy of life most deeply.

In one of the ten thousand little streets of the city the young man stood still. On the door at which, trembling with excitement, he knocked sharply twice, a doctor's plate was fixed: "Dott. Carvagno."

Immediately the door opened and Italo was drawn in:

"At last! At last!"

His anxiety was unnecessary. Bianca's husband, one of the chiefs of the *Ospedale civico*, was spending the night at the hospital, as he so often did of late. Two hours earlier he had sent a messenger to fetch a book to him.

All went auspiciously, and Italo found compensation for his overstrained nerves in the joy that only the warm, tireless embrace of a mature woman, ripe in the lore of love, can bring to men who still are boys.

7

The night express to Milan had long crossed the endless chain of bridges over the lagoons. The Maestro sat by the window of a first-class carriage in which he was the only passenger. Utterly tired as he was after his long day, he must needs sacrifice the night also, contrary to the firm rule of his life. Thoughts that were no thoughts came and went, impressions that could not be called impressions flitted through his mind. But stronger than any vague thoughts or impressions was the beating in his ever-sensitive ear of the thundering rhythm of the wheels.

In his dislike of easygoing habits, Verdi did not lie down or put up his feet upon the opposite seat. He sat upright in his corner without even unbuttoning his coat, only his head was bent forward so that a corner of his collar covered his face. Between sleeping and waking, the sound of the train came to the Maestro's ears, a sound that, when the mind is at ease, is not unpleasant and serves to pass the time.

But for him anxiety, indeterminate but unceasing, haunted all the forms of life. Did sleep overtake him for a moment, immediately he was jerked back painfully to consciousness, startled by some noise from the machinery. He was tormented by the feeling that his travelling case was lost. And that must never be allowed to happen! It must be defended with his life. There was a music score in it that nobody could read, it had been eating his heart out for thirty years; at one time he had believed that it would prove his justification in the face of all his enemies. Again and again, as sleep approached,

the Maestro woke in a fever of anxiety about this wretched score that in his waking hours he heartily cursed.

Presently he began to recall how on a former journey in a post chaise the same fear had pursued him between sleep and waking. Always there was some such unfinished piece of work in his valise that he must defend. But his enemies in these days had been few. And a man could face a few enemies with a light heart if he could keep them down there beneath him, those schoolmasters, tap-room musicians, journalists and musical critics. But now his enemies were rising up above him, they stood high up over his head, those musical critics. And the flames were coming nearer. It was going to be another flood, of flames this time, and all the centenarians and the laurel-wreathed heads were blazing together in it and the blessed Italian *Flebile dolcezza* too. Once he even shouted, "Here, Riccini, here Gluck!" But they were both burnt up and nobody bothered about them.

Through these visions there crept into Verdi's heart a strange sense of comfort, and before the kaleidoscope of sleep darkened, a reassuring voice said within him: "But the German had a good face."

After that he plunged into the night of sleep and a shining path of dream ran through the thicket. This path led to a spot that just before had been one of the decorations of the carriage, where a crowd of people were standing before a king with deeply furrowed features and a glittering crown on his head. The king's grief was convincing and the heaven up to which he rode over dark clouds was convincing, but his cloak was not convincing, it was a property cloak from the Scala theatre that hundreds of actors had worn.

And what was that company of stage-farmers doing in the background, joining hands and posturing, advancing and retiring to a silly-symmetrical tune?

Then came something horrible—something incredible. This worn tragic-faced king began to sing in a minor key a sharply accented polka measure that went on and on hideously, strophe after strophe.

And at the end of every strophe the chorus joined in, repeating the motive and accompanying the king's rapid, meaningless song.

The dreamer swore again and again that this music was not his, that never in his greenest youth had he written stuff like that.

But it was no use, God had so willed it. He saw undeserved shame being heaped upon him, as on a martyr whom no man could save, and, through a door, people pressed in continually to witness his bitter ignominy. The more he defended himself, the harder his fate pursued him. Slowly and with growing clearness he realized that he himself was the king, that it was he who sang, captive and in chains, this wretched polka measure and out of that web of notes there was no way of escape for him.

Then came what from the first he had dreaded. Followed by two helmeted Prussian soldiers Wagner entered, in evening clothes under a yellow overcoat, a silk hat in his hand. For a moment he contemplated the spectacle. But his face was no longer good, it was proud and angry.

With death in his heart, the dreamer had to continue to sing his endless tune over and over again while Wagner turning loftily to the soldiers threw out the words:

"This trickling Cantilene is child's play to me!"

Then the singer cried aloud and threw his crown to the ground while the choir bleated on. Wagner merely said sharply in German:

"Out! Away with him!"

The train drew up, clanging. The Maestro was awake at once, his face distorted with sleep, dreams and fatigue. Through the window he saw the many lights of a great station.

"Verona! Only Verona!"

And he sighed.

CHAPTER III

THE OPERA IN THE VALISE

1

BIANCA CARVAGNO was thirty-two. She had joined the ranks of those who have shed the last veil of girlhood, revealing the woman into whom the girl has bloomed, in a deeper and more individual beauty. There was no hint of fading or decay in her beauty. When she looked in her glass in the morning, she was not met by that bugbear of other women after a sleepless night, the sight of a new line drawn here or there on her face. Still, she often gazed suspiciously into her glass, and dabbed her cheeks hard with the powder puff as if she were angry and must slap something.

The disquietude which tormented her arose from this, that though she was herself young and in her prime, Italo was yet so much younger, so irremediably younger than she. Was he capable of recognizing her beauty? Was it not too deep, too fully expanded by the sun of life for his still undeveloped nature!

How exacting are the claims of love! Daily and alone she toiled under a burden of danger, care and anguish.

Both men and women during their early twenties are cruel to those who are older than themselves. They think of youth as a distinction, with the arrogance of the centenarian, Gritti, who believed himself entitled to worship on account of his age. So to Italo, arrogantly assured of his youth, it seemed only natural that the burden should fall on the shoulders of Bianca, who was nine years older, wiser and more experienced than he. His simple role was to enjoy—daily and nightly to drink the joy of life from the depths of her womanhood, and manfully to brave whatever danger or adventure he might encounter. He had no forebodings and his heart was light.

But the more light-hearted her lover was, the more Bianca suffered. Her burden weighed on her like a mountain. She dared not admit her oppression to herself lest the realization should crush her utterly, and she kept up an exaggerated pretence of happiness to reassure herself. When Italo was with her, the unchained hours soared, momentarily released from the deadening weight. But as soon as he was gone she stifled again under the load.

Carvagno seemed to suspect nothing. Of late years his fame, not only as a practitioner, but also as head and organizer of the Hospital, had increased enormously. A chair of medicine had been offered him by some of the first Universities in the country, but he held back, because he did not wish to hamper his activity by assuming an official position too early. His passionate zeal for experimental work in which his private life was completely merged, amounted at times to a frenzy. It seemed a slight thing to Bianca to betray so negligible a husband. She did not hate him. He was only a stranger to her, incomprehensible always, receding further every day in his everlasting hospital slops, his irritable forgetfulness, and his sarcastic professional manner.

But distasteful as the hand was, she held it fast. Bianca was several months with child—for the first time. Till now she had not been a mother.

To none do the early months of childbearing befall so happily as to the woman of thirty. Mature in body and clear of spirit she joys in that inner blooming as the deeply conscious spirit of earth must joy in the return of spring. In every fibre Bianca thrilled to this upspringing of life. But what was that against the agony, the inferno of horror to which she must awake every morning asking herself anew whose child this might be and whose blood that beat so quick and hot within her?

All these reasons, but particularly the carelessness with which Italo treated this

formidable responsibility, combined to reduce her to a state of insane jealousy. Italo took Bianca's jealousy as lightly as his own responsibility. Too young to know the force of actual passion, a lover, a father or a friend was for him only an outlet for life, a means of experiencing tenderness, amorousness or excitement. The power that subdues all into whose eyes truth has looked had not yet mastered him. And so the explanation is simple how at the time when he had formed this strongest of personal relationships Italo was binding himself closely in another direction. Through the painter Wolkov, who on his side knew Joukovsky, Italo had been introduced into Wagner's circle, and one day he came face to face with the master himself. High above all else in Italo's memory stood that day, and the warmth, the kindness, the humorous wisdom of Wagner's words.

The extraordinary vitality of Richard Wagner was irresistible even to men who were themselves possessed of ripe personality and intrinsic force. There was Peter Cornelius, who fled repeatedly from the "sultry atmosphere of this man" only to be drawn into it anew. How should a boy, in whose being a crowd of perplexing impulses surged, withstand his influence?

The attraction of Richard Wagner was not merely—and this was his secret—that of the great man, the ever-active manifold genius, the master of his art, which he was; over and above this he possessed—one can find no other description for it—the attraction of woman. There radiated from him as from a woman of noble nature who, in spite of tragic experience, has never known defeat or disgrace, that constant erotic force, that stream of negative and positive magnetism which is generated by all the forms of unhappy love. The older he became, the more this invincible necessity grew upon him to bring others under his spell; he had but to let his eyes rest on one, equal with or greater than himself, whom he had not yet won, and the compelling stream of charm flowed out from him. In our days it has become clear that the dominant quantity in his nature was feminine, and it is more than a coincidence that when he adventured into literature his work bore the title "Of the Feminine in Men."

For months Italo had done nothing save study German and feast upon extracts from Tristan or the Walküre. When he rose from the piano his head swam and his limbs shook as if after a night of dissipation, and his eyes were ringed with black.

How different was the power of Verdi's melody over his father! If he only whistled that music under his breath, his eye brightened and a quickening inspiration seemed to invigorate all his being.

Italo's passion for the music of Wagner, though he did not himself realize it, had somewhat cooled him towards Bianca. He had once been eager to spend every possible moment with her, but now he haunted the Piazza every night. Wagner came often to one of the cafés. Only that day, in the café Lavenna, he had heard that the Master often spent hours, talking and meditating and even working, there.

With beating heart, like a bashful boy who waits at the street corner to catch a passing glimpse of a beloved and longed-for maid, Italo quested through and round the Square. When fortune smiled on him, and Wagner, alone and talking earnestly to himself, entered a coffee house, Italo would follow him at a distance and, after a few minutes, enter also, his cup of joy full to the brim. Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he would immediately bow to the master, raising his hat and flushing scarlet, then seat himself at a table not too far distant.

At times Wagner would call the young man to him, with no trace of the self-conscious charmer in his look or manner. Italo would ask this question and that. He would essay to speak in German, were it only embarrassed monosyllables, while in every glance the flame of worship gleamed. With a friendly nod he would be dismissed, faint with mingled delight and regret. Richard Wagner had a weakness for the Italian temperament. Nothing flattered the

composer more than the profound influence which his work had upon the élite of that ancient race, an influence which time only strengthened.

It was easy to understand how all Bianca's jealousy had come to centre upon Wagner. One morning—it was more than a fortnight after the historic concert in La Venice and Maestro Giuseppe Verdi's short sojourn in Venice—Italo was sitting beside his mistress. Bianca was not feeling well and had lain down. Italo was holding her hand and jerking his knee impatiently.

"He will be here till four o'clock this afternoon. After that he has an appointment. You will come to me then, will you not, my Italo?"

"This afternoon?"

Italo looked out of the window as he repeated the words.

Bianca's eyes sparkled but she said nothing. He drew away his hand.

"This afternoon? Certainly. I will be here at four o'clock. I will pass him outside. Then I will stay . . ."

"Then you will stay, you will stay . . . !"

"Yes, I can stay three-quarters of an hour. At five o'clock, unfortunately, I have to keep this wretched engagement to play in the quartet. . . ."

"Play in a quartet?"

Bianca was deeply offended, but she assumed an indifferent air. Hoping to escape a scene, Italo explained eagerly.

"Yes, we are practising at Corteccia's. The Pretender, you know, has invited us to play next Sunday. We are getting up a very interesting programme."

Italo broke off, for Bianca had risen and was gazing at him quietly and steadily.

"What is it? What's the matter? Bianca, sweetest . . ."

She still stared at him tense and silent.

"Biancina!" He tried to kiss her, but she repulsed him.

"But what have I done, Bianca mine?"

She only answered,

"A quartet!"

Then there broke loose the storm of meaningless, hysterical laughter that he knew so well and feared more than anything in the world.

"Go to your quartet, then! You weak, cowardly liar! Go to your Wagner, to that old monster who is making a fool of you, for whom you have deceived me, you vain, dishonest, idle fool!"

The laughter came in spasms. Italo caressed her.

"Bianca! Biancina! I swear I'm not deceiving you. It's not to Wagner that I am going. The quartet . . ."

"Go to your Wagner, to your Wagner!"

She began to range the room.

"To deceive me, deceive me——"

"But Biancina! How can I be deceiving you with an old man? What nonsense! This is something quite different, something spiritual; you can't be angry at it."

The word destroyed the last remnant of her reason.

"Something spiritual? Ah! You and your spirit! So you correct me, you insult me! But go, go! Don't come here again! I want nothing more to do with you. You shall never come here again while I live. You young devil! Stay with your German! I do not want you! Go! Go!"

"Bianca! You are talking sheer nonsense! Calm yourself. I will stay with you the whole afternoon."

"I don't want you, I won't allow you to stay! Go! Now, at once! I could kill you! Mind yourself!"

She picked up a letter weight and lifted it high. The full, untrammelled figure towered magnificently. The thrill that ran through him revealed the situation to Italo. He stood up with his hands in his pockets as if dismissing the subject and said coldly:

"Throw it."

The whole weight of her misery burst upon the woman. Stricken as by death, she fell upon a couch. Her breathing was choked, her heart ceased to beat.

Then he knelt on the floor by her and begged for forgiveness, penitent, sobbing, swearing his devotion. The inevitable reconciliation followed. Softened and exhausted, stroking his hair as tenderly as a mother, she gave him, as so often before, leave for the afternoon.

Out in the street the young man wrestled for a short time with a physical sensation of internal discomfort and the moral problem whether he ought to accept the gift of the afternoon. But soon the uneasiness subsided and, though his mistress was suffering and perhaps bearing his child, though his future was waiting, full of peril and uncertainty, he went gaily and proudly, almost like a conqueror, through the ringing, rhythmic streets of his native town to his father's house.

An hour later, when the last trace of the outburst had disappeared from Bianca's face, Dr. Carvagno came home. The weary man, half dazed with his crowded day, felt something unusual in the air. He did not try to discover what. His continually overtaxed brain had no time to study his own atmosphere. Still, it so happened that as he sat down a little heavily and sadly beside his wife, he imagined that she looked at him more closely than usual. In a strange, faint voice she put the unwonted question:

"What is it, my dear? You look sad to-night."

Carvagno tried to think why he should be looking sad, and something that had happened in the course of the day's work recurred to him.

"A sad story that!"

Bianca questioned him again. Then he told her, disconnectedly and wearily, as if uneasily conscious that a busy doctor of forty ought not to let indefinable impressions weigh upon him—a rambling story about a fair-haired, beautiful child.

"The parents? Young Germans! *Poveretti!* In misery. A feeble creature who, God knows why, calls himself an artist. He? I don't know, I'm puzzled. He is not a consumptive, at least not an ordinary one. The man seems to suffer from hallucinations of greatness and euphoristic mania. But the child! Absolutely golden hair. An angel!"

The doctor stood up and kissed his wife lightly on the hair.

She moved restlessly, making the quick kiss appear frustrated and unreal. Carvagno felt the awkwardness, and, a little shamefacedly, went to his writing-table. The unintelligible reaction of his nerves annoyed him and he stirred his papers about aimlessly.

2

Renzo had been back in Rome for some time and Italo was seldom at home. So the Senator lived alone with his folios in his own room. He no longer frequented the Square as before, in the true Venetian way, and seldom entered the coffee houses or appeared in company. Very rarely was his great white head in its democratic slouch hat to be seen in one of the groups of his contemporaries, the disappointed intellectuals, who were his former associates. Indeed, his associates grew fewer every day. As the rising bourgeoisie everywhere increased in prosperity and self-importance and the old ideas of liberty were forgotten, the great dogmas of the heroic times, like all on which his life had been founded, had turned to empty phrases. In the changed times, even the Senator's unbending attitude unconsciously took on something of the modernism which he so hated.

The effervescent spirit of the Senator was weak and obstinate compared with the practical strength of Verdi's nature. Had he possessed the Maestro's gift,

his music would have remained stationary from long before the period of Rigoletto, and for the last ten years he would have been hammering away, feebly and defiantly, upon the forms that he had already conquered. Verdi, who had to wage so long a war with men and movements, was never defeated by them; whenever the great hour struck he was always the man of his own time, not the man of yesterday, not of to-morrow, but—standing free and independent on the peak of the moment—always the man of to-day.

The Senator had long ceased to be the man of *his* day. This was the dim, half-conscious burden of his life. One after another in the last year the heroes of the reawakened nation had passed away, and the sun in which they had shone so bravely no longer fell on them. Out of the ever-deepening shadows he stretched out longing arms to the vanishing light.

When Italo returned home after the stormy interview with Bianca, to his astonishment, he found his father in a cheerful and expansive mood. He was greeted with the hearty irony which was always a good sign.

"You are certainly the son of your day rather than of your father! A great company of friends you must have, swallowing up your life, for one never sees you! But I don't blame you for it. Live! Live! I am not preaching virtue to you. That is a huge mistake—the incarnation of the Beautiful and the Good, of which Socrates dreamed, was the greatest of all delusions. One does not need to have been imprisoned as a revolutionary in order to know the value of life. Drinking hemlock is a piece of useless vanity; and as for the cross, the wisest men seem to be those who have made a good living out of it. But a dandy everybody must despise! Melody, my boy, melody is the only thing! No home in heaven, no home on earth! But there's always melody. Anyhow, I have always found something in it that . . ."

He struck the music of the Rheingold that was lying on the table.

"If you can find me a melody in this battleground of notes, I'll give you a handsome reward."

Italo took no notice of the last sentence. He looked with surprise at his father, who was putting on his overcoat and looking for his hat.

"You are going out, Papa ?"

"As you see, and I'm in a hurry."

"Can I do anything to help you ?"

Italo had a reason for showing friendliness to the Senator. For a moment the not over-indulged father turned an affectionate look on his son.

"You want some money, my boy ? Say nothing ! I know. You want the reward beforehand. Life hits a man suddenly, and he sits there . . . What the devil, why am I saying this now ?"

He put a couple of gold pieces in his son's hand and went out.

The reason of his good-humour was the following letter which the Senator had received that morning.

"My Dear Friend,

"When I took leave of you the other day my desire was to flee from cities and their crowds and to get back to my duties and interests in Saint Agatha again.

"But now all is changed. Snow has fallen, and covers everything, this abominable snow which I dread—which, as far as I can look back, has always been associated with trouble in my life. And so I find I can do nothing to any purpose in this wilderness. Once perhaps, I might have worked here, but not now. Genoa, which I used to like, does not suit me any longer. There are too many people there who will not understand that I must have unbroken quiet. Listen now! I have taken the idiotic notion in my head, that your Venice might be good for me. I have never stayed long in the town, in fact, it oppressed me. But now the ridiculous, irresistible idea keeps recurring to me that I could work there. Work? It's a big word and you must not misunderstand it. There is nothing new in question, but only the remodelling and condensing of old material.

"Still, even for such patchwork I have neither head nor hands here.

"It has always been my way, as you know, to leave no stone unturned to avoid failure, or even to convince myself that I have failed.

"Now then, do me a favour! Off with you as fast as you can—for perhaps there may already be a telegram on the way announcing my arrival—and take a large room for me in the Albergo on the Riva, where I stayed last time. It is more open and suits me better than L'Europe, where poor Piave always went. See that there is a tolerably tuned piano put into the room. And then—this is important!—nobody is to know that I am in Venice! You understand, nobody! This is supremely important and I leave it in your charge! I will and must be unmolested. That is all. Hurry off, now! What pleasure it gives me, to look forward to enjoying your companionship in my life again, you can well imagine.

"Addio, addio, addio,

"Your G. VERDI.

"Peppina, who is not at all pleased with my project, sends her warmest greetings."

For years the Senator had had no one to live for. His sincere and warm attachment to Verdi was therefore doubled. With the enthusiastic energy of a young lover who decks his room for the first time to receive his beloved, he turned to his task. Entering the hotel which Verdi had mentioned, he took the manager on one side, and informed him that an illustrious personage whom he might not name was going to honour their house. He made the manager swear that he would not allow this illustrious personage to suspect that he was known for the illustrious personage that he was. Then, with the whole staff of the hotel servants, from the chiefest chief waiter to the page boys, behind him, he stormed through the rooms, banging doors, throwing the windows open, moving the furniture, knocking down a vase in his fury, exclaiming, finding fault, admiring, pooh-poohing, and for a whole hour could find no room good enough for him. Then when the manager, with endless protestations and reservations, had at last unlocked the great front room on the first floor, the Royal Apartment as it was called, the Senator's irresistible fire compelled the man, whether he liked it or not, to take a burgher's price for it. Next, he proceeded to demand alteration after alteration. The writing-table must stand there by the window, with an excellent reading-lamp beside it, and an armchair must be placed on the wide handsome balcony that looked down on San Giorgio and the lagoon. Heating was arranged for and a liberal table; every objection was overruled on the ground of the honour that was being done to the house, and the overwhelmed hotel-keeper was finally reduced to helpless acquiescence. With twenty hardly intelligible orders still on his lips, the Senator hurried away.

There stood in Venice at this time, near the Procuration, a music warehouse which had originally belonged to the famous Gallo, who, himself a distinguished musician and a still more distinguished Impresario, was one of the most exquisite originals that Verdi or Venice had ever known. The business of piano-hiring was carried on for some time after his death.

The Senator entered the shop and tried some six instruments. With his cigar in his mouth, he patiently sounded, as a piano-tuner might have done, a series of chords and chromatic passages on the keys. None of the pianos pleased him. The same procedure was gone through in two other warehouses till at last, in the Merceria, the right instrument was found, chosen and bargained for. At the same time the Senator ordered a complete set of Verdi's works to be sent with it. Why, he could not have said. It was an act of unreasoning impulse, for the old man was emotional to the core. In that, perhaps, lay the explanation of the futility of his life.

Nor did these duties exhaust the list of his touching anxieties for his friend. A florist had to be found who at that dead season of the year knew how to render the impossible possible, wines had to be chosen and directed to the hotel and much else besides.

Quite spent, the Senator returned home late in the afternoon, but even then there was no rest for him. He must select books for his friend's reading. He searched for some strong and poetic fiction, which he thought should be suitable. But he found very little. Still, a few volumes of Victor Hugo and Zola might

serve. Tired out by excitement more than his haste and labour, he had at last to lie down. And to no one could he confide his joy, though he longed to shout to every acquaintance he met, "Verdi is coming here."

3

"How sad it is to see a man like him, to whom no one would impute his sixty years, who never had a headache, who ate as heartily as a boy, and supervised his farm for hours on end in the blazing sun with a large straw hat on his head—to see such a man declaring himself too exhausted to write another note!"—*From a speech of Giulio Ricordi in* 1880, *quoted by Bragagnola.*

Two days later, to his own surprise, the Maestro stood in that gorgeous hotel chamber with its glorious view over the lagoon. With great self-control the Senator, realizing from his monosyllabic greeting that his friend would prefer to be left alone with the thoughts that occupied him, had taken his departure with his invitation to dine unspoken.

Not often in his life had Giuseppe Verdi done anything that was not based on sober reason. Accustomed to rule his life firmly and solely by his will, he had been forced to recognize since his return to Genoa that a desire was overmastering that powerful will of his, the ungovernable desire to be in Venice.

Such impulse was foreign to him, unnatural, and he held it to be a disgrace. Even after his resolve was taken, he had found it hard to speak the word Venice before his wife.

For long he argued the point with himself. What had that town to offer him? Rest? How could he be sure that he would find rest there? Inspiration for his work? He knew well that his genius owed nothing to place or landscape; that, inwardly begotten and inwardly nourished, his work welled forth without outward aid.

But a command had come to him which, after a brief struggle, he obeyed. He had an assured consciousness that he was being led by the hand of fate, however unreasonable the step seemed to him. Similarly unreasonable had seemed the act to which he had owed the first—and, as such, the essential—success of his public career. He had written a horribly rude letter of protest to Richter, the Impresario, who had power of life and death over his recently submitted opera. Any other man would have thrown that letter in the waste-paper basket. And he himself, after it had left his hand, had hoped for nothing further.

But it was just this letter that led to the production of Nabucco by Merelli, the all-powerful director of the Scala, and opened before him the career which now lay behind him. Who and what had moved him to write the outrageous letter and, later, to perform this or that other act of which his reason disapproved? Though the Maestro never discussed this problem, it had vexed his mind from his youth, and admirers of the full-blooded creator of Trovatore often stared in astonishment at the contents of the library at Saint Agatha.

The Maestro was convinced that in certain rare moments of our lives a power works in us that must lie outside of us; and that, exempt from the limitations of sense, open-eyed and independent, it ranges through time and space while we are painfully clambering up the pitiful ladder of reason. This truth governed his soul like a religion, though he might not have defined it so clearly in his mind.

He had been brought nearer to recognition of it by Manzoni, whose conversion to Catholicism and his constant use of the word "grace"—as if he, the man of revolution, still confused religion with popery—so often angered Verdi. For Verdi hated the priesthood as in his inmost heart he loved the church, which had been the one glimpse of beauty amid the poverty of his childhood, the music-charmed home of his soul.

And so he came to Venice in the unspoken hope that he was not merely

yielding to a vague desire but that through that desire an overruling spirit spoke. Not, indeed, that he ever acknowledged this hope, for he was wont to affirm, brusquely brushing the transcendental aside, "We are all sceptics nowadays."

Yet to that hope, whether confessed or secret, he had always to return, for the situation, the longer he boldly faced it, became more and more intolerable.

The mask of the burly farmer, the practical agriculturalist, stood him in good stead. Yes, he loved his fields, he loved his stables, his cattle, even the road-making and draining he had introduced into the simple country region. But it was only a mask. He was no farmer even now. The romantic city journalists might amuse themselves as they would with the sensational paradox of the world-renowned composer turning to the ploughtail—the hard-headed old man knew his own limitations better. He was no farmer, he had never really been a landward man. In spite of all his hatred of dilettantism and the abruptness of his manner, his *life* did not lie among these things.

The single and inviolable truth was this: for ten years he had not written one note of real import, but only trifles. The Requiem, his last work, bade fair to be his own death-knell.

"Ten years of emptiness."

Often, especially in the last few months, he would murmur these words to himself like an incantation. There lay in them the curse of the creative man who, day after day, is conscious of a precious gift running to waste.

To work! To feel again the fever in which a man poured out his being. To work! To feel the joy of increase rise to agony. For, when calmly weighed, the pangs of creation are greater than the joy. . . .

And yet, what a parasite, what a cumberer of the ground is the man who can no longer work! A thousand issues and no spring! A thousand onsets all evaded! Was it for him to feel that misery of age, the feebleness that creeps through limbs in which strength once has waxed? For him to know impotence and defeat? But attainment? Well-earned renown? Another had won these in full measure, one altogether other than he, whom for that cause he could almost hate.

"Ten years, ten years!"

The Maestro went out on the balcony. Already the early January twilight was falling. Down on the Riva degli Schiavoni people, rubbing shoulders in the relaxation of the evening, swarmed over the two bridges. A dense, buzzing sound—a rope twisted from the strands of a thousand voices—swung over the city. Before the San Zaccaria landing-bridge lay the steamer which plied between the islands, and upon it, as upon the bridges, gleamed the first lamps of the evening. The old-fashioned little boats waddled busily through the water which swayed like a pendulum between the mouths of the two canals. The first month of the year 1883, although unnaturally warm, was sad-coloured and gloomy. A mist rose from the lagoon like a cloud of dust from a summer street. The colour of this cloud was dark; dark, too, was the colour of the lagoon, which seemed to be no part of the Adriatic, purple and azure mother of song, but of some Dutch Zuyder Zee or Finnish Gulf.

San Giorgio had long disappeared behind the mist, the Dogana and Maria dell Salute swam like a gloomy northern mountain range in the darkening sky. Over the rapid, gliding current the Bora sprang up, raising a thousand little crested waves from the ancient, blind-eyed water in a gay, impudent dance. And all the pontoons on the Lagoon, all the gondolas of the Piazetta, the gondolas farther out, even the heavy Chioggia boats joined in the dance, this swaying dance of water lapping round a city known through ages as the City of Love.

Promptly the night fell upon the wanton dance. And in the same moment, as if it had been chosen for consummation, a great, solitary, seagoing ship broke into the chaos of darkness, mist, wind and motion, its scanty lights

barely touching its heavy sides with life. Long and swelling, like the mournful wailing of death, the foghorn howled aloud.

The Maestro left the balcony and turned on all the lights. Then with steady steps, as his habit was, he paced the great room a hundred times, round and round the central table. At last he went to the piano and drew his right hand quickly over the keys. The first two bars of the Rigoletto quartet sprang unbidden under his fingers. As if he had heard something repulsive, Verdi drew down the lid of the piano.

"I have come here. Why? For what? But here it must be. Here alone!

"Who is the obstacle, but he? Except for him I could work. It is like an evil spell. I have never been afraid till now.—Yes, devil take it, afraid!—But now I must arm myself!—Arm myself for battle.—That is madness.—But why have I this certainty that it will be a battle?—Ah, he did not know me!—And we might have been friends! With him alone could I talk as with a friend. What childishness!—I know every feature of his face. Something drew me strongly to this man. Battle! Yes, battle!"

The meaning of this word "battle" that ran through his thoughts continually was not clear in the Maestro's mind. Suddenly he snapped his teeth together, a fierce, wild look came into his face, so that one seeing him then would have drawn back as from something dangerous. Bending down he lifted a valise up on the table. He opened it with a little key and took out a great portfolio full of music paper. On the title page in large letters was written,

"*Il re Lear, opera di G. Verdi.*"

4

At the moment when the Maestro was pacing his room in the hotel, Italo was crossing and recrossing the Piazza with hurried, eager footsteps. Past the Procuration, past the Library, up to the Palace of the Doges, down to the Church, posting backwards and forwards again and again, he waited for his idol. At last, he saw the slight, distinguished figure of the Master approaching from the Accensione.

Wagner was walking with a man who was no taller than himself. This stranger, with his black beard, hollow cheeks, and too-sharply pointed nose, had the appearance of a Jew whose life was spent in some recondite study. Even so, his personality was overshadowed, as that of any man walking with Wagner inevitably seemed to be.

The great man was speaking uninterruptedly in the strong, pregnant tones that were peculiar to him. The other listened with smiling eyes fixed upon the ground as if he read something pleasant there. Whenever Wagner's voice fell for a moment, in a purely formal pause for answer, the stranger's lips formed the merest breath of a word, hardly deserving of the name of speech. Why speak when all has already been said?

Twice the man attempted, perhaps only out of politeness, to take his part in the conversation. But at the first pause in his phrases the voice of Wagner broke in and flowed on as before. He spoke eagerly, his words sharp and emphatic, like those of a man who has a long statement to make and for whom time presses. The subject of the conversation must have concerned him very closely, for his manner grew more and more impatient and even angry. But the stranger, it was clear, shrank into himself, not because he was being reproached, but because he was engrossed by his own thoughts. It was *these* that bowed his shoulders so heavily.

Still higher rose the voice of Richard Wagner. He shook his head quickly as if a wasp had settled there, he stamped his foot, although the bearded man had not offered him the least opposition, but was now walking with his eyes

almost closed. Perhaps the Master was provoked by his irresponsive, featureless silence, for he pressed his fist against the unresisting body of the other man. Suddenly throwing back his head like a beast that hears the hunter behind him, his eyes widened as if he had caught a distant call, and he motioned to his companion, without turning his head, to pass on and leave him alone. The other immediately obeyed and went on his unresponsive way without a look behind him. His features horribly distorted, Wagner changed colour, and throwing up his left hand suddenly he clenched it in the air.

Italo saw his high-held head with its flowing hair and look of youthful age suddenly become stricken and piteous, sinking weakly and heavily on his breast under the fierce onslaught of this tempest. The paroxysm, a mild and harmless one from which Wagner soon recovered, did not occupy fifty seconds. The Master stood still for a moment, then, pulling himself together, he called to the other man, who had not gone far.

The conversation was taken up again; it flowed easily and cheerfully now, mingled with gusts of laughter. The stranger's manner was completely altered. He seemed to talk wittily and laughed pleasantly without restraint. The two men entered the colonnade of the Procuration, whither Italo could not follow.

The sight of the sudden, overmastering agony of this man who was so godlike in his eyes shook him profoundly. A feeling, till then strange to the handsome, conceited lad, thrilled every nerve, a feeling of compassion which extended to the moribund Marchese, to Wagner, and to Bianca.

He hurried to her, himself an object of pity, sobbing as he went, crying out, praying, vowing, and swearing.

He found her sitting before a little table. She seemed to him to be putting away something at which she had been working. She was dressed in dark colours and her hair mingled with the darkness of the room, so that only the paleness of her tragic Roman face was visible. A presentiment of death, unknown till now, lay upon her, and although she had been waiting for him, oppressed by her burden of conflicting emotions, hope, hate, despair, mortal dread, and forbearance, now that—no longer hoped for—he had come, she hardly smiled upon him.

Grief-stricken, Italo went forward blindly and, without putting out his hand to her, fell before her weeping, the first tears he had ever shed for another than himself.

She did not soothe him, nor seek to take his hand, she did not stroke his hair. In the gracious loveliness of her state, a beauty only to be discerned by eyes that life has opened, she gazed quietly upon the distracted boy. Then, her own tears only half restrained, she said:

"Dear, you feel it now?"

A minute later Dr. Carvagno entered the room. The lovers had no time to prepare themselves, but the doctor was quite incapable of realizing the perplexing and painful position. He looked at Italo. Self-conceit annoyed him, but he was grateful enough that the young fop, as he considered him, should keep the lonely Bianca company. He checked a fleeting suspicion, as soon as it was formed, for a variety of egotistic reasons.

Italo, quite overcome, remained speechless, holding out his invitation to supper.

Does it not seem as if, while we still meet life carelessly, God, careless Himself, looks on indulgently, but no sooner do we begin to feel its bitterness than His inexorable hand falls heavily upon us?

5

"Though at heart I hate all over-strenuousness, I labour furiously. Solitude and study: that is my life."—*Verdi to the sculptor Luccardi*, 1850.

Some thirty years before, Giuseppe Verdi had entrusted the production of the libretto of King Lear to the Venetian writer, Somma.

Somma, under the influence of Italian melodrama as it has developed from Metastasio to Felice Romani, had condensed Shakespeare's tragedy into three acts, practically reducing it to the great scene which forms the climax of the play. From this scene the whole character and motivation of the opera, as well as its entire text, was derived.

In this, the librettist was not perhaps so ill-advised as our æsthetic critics would have us believe, for the drama of music is enacted on a totally different plane from the drama of written tragedy, and the two could never have been reconciled.

What is known as the drama of music is the rationalization of a super-rational form, which for the moment obscures the charm and sets aside the prerogative of the music, while the psychological meaning of the work is brought into the foreground.

A true child of the nineteenth century is this music-drama, the fruit of its biological and materialistic tendency, its preoccupation with cause.

It was Verdi's mission to rescue traditional opera and secure its future development. We see his genius harnessed to the double task of renewing the old worn-out form and restoring it to human verisimilitude without enslaving it to the music-drama of the north.

With one voice the musical critics of Europe have combined to contrast Verdi's work with Wagner's. But Verdi, according to his own confession, shared Wagner's worst failing—over-strenuousness—that strained effort which, however they might hate it, neither was able to escape. Criticism which, in spite of much futile execration, is nothing but the collected opinion of common humanity, was in this case superficial and mistaken.

It is true that Wagner's work is a thousand-branched epitome of poetry, music and philosophy. But, between these domains their creator acknowledged no frontiers, he expressed his genius as if from a point alike beyond them all. In an ether, devoid of any conditioning or hampering element, free from all practical necessity, and obeying only the laws of his own being, he accomplished his incommensurable work. At bottom Wagner never attempted to take part in the actual life of the world, he even ignored it in the working out of his gifts. For *while* he was writing he made no effort to write for an actual public. He was a German, and to be German meant—"To you everything is possible because nothing, no condition and no form, can bind you." It is true Wagner created a prodigious community of his own. But this world of his, as he willed it and wished it to be, was not drawn from any one nation, but from the desperadoes of the soul in all nations, the sophisticated, the romantics, whose intellectual meeting-place Bayreuth was.

The youthful Verdi, a composer of operas, obliged to write with an eye upon opera seasons and opera singers, had hated, all his life, the canting intonations of the word "Art." He did not give to the art of music the romantic title of a vocation, or a mission in life; it did not connote for him the ideal of super-manliness that flourishes in the lofty air of the garret, or any of the flimsy formulas that have so deteriorated in value since then.

Art was a thing that had its place in the life of men because from it they might derive the highest forms of pleasure. He himself was interested in this thing, because he worked at it, very much as the painters of the great epoch painted, not because they had some theory of light or form to express, but because the pious demanded pictures that appealed to the eye and to the heart. Verdi wrote for the public, for the people who thronged the theatres of Italy.

And he also, he knew, would be thrown into the mill of the centuries, that grinds every art and class and creature between its steadily moving stones. At first he had hoped by his inspired revolutionary strains to sing Young Italy into freedom. But that soon passed and he stood alone. Yet the claims of the men of his time constantly appealed to him, the people called to him, the strongest among them. And he did his part. Not with the inspired ardour of his

early youth and not seeking any formal recognition or position, he worked, in those enthusiastic forms that have since fallen into derision, for the world of men. Wagner, unrooted, was free for flight. Verdi, a captive, the ball and chain on his feet, with a file in his hand cut through his fetters.

Those who read this tedious exposition may perhaps ask where in Giuseppe Verdi's work all this artistry is displayed. If they could have observed the Maestro on that January evening as he sat before his manuscript, they might have better understood.

Verdi sat at the great table beside the large reading-lamp that the Senator had compelled the manager to produce. As the grey head resting on the short, broad hand nodded and shook over the paper, the strained resolution of his face never relaxed for a moment, that grim fighting face which his friends knew so well.

Before him lay the libretto of Lear.

What a history these pages had ! Seven times had Somma to recommence; every line was endlessly corrected, every syllable rewritten, rearranged and arranged yet again, before it was allowed to stand. And when for the seventh time the poet, almost ready for murder, presented the finished book, Verdi was once more dissatisfied, for the disjointed and incoherent dramaturgy was a patchwork of botched and amended lines; the scenes had been cut to pieces and fitted together again, till after the thirtieth attempt something, anything, was finally scrawled into the composition. Connected writing was uncongenial to Somma by nature rather than from any paucity of words, but he threw himself at the work with the brute force that was part of his character. Alas, his only means of expression seemed to be outcry and interjection ! If it had been possible, he would have liked the whole text of the opera to consist of nothing but ejaculations of joy, pleasure, pain or surprise. What need was there for long sentences of many words that nobody understood when there was music going on ? Musical speech and logical words were quite opposite things. What was the use, anyhow, of all that long-winded discussion of mythological gods that served no purpose except to be drowned by the exasperated orchestra. No ! It was all a mistake ! Music was meant to express human emotions, actions, character and conflict, but never these abstract, contemplative ideas.

So there was no help for it ! Verdi himself had to rewrite most of the words for his Lear music. The problem that faced him was whether to set the whole action of the great original to words, or to make the word material only a resting-point between the music pictures. Predominant the words must not be, but a scarcely perceptible undercurrent in the stream of music. No longer as in the texts of Solera, Cammarano and Piave could the regular seven, eight, nine or eleven syllabled line be allowed. Not by the counting of syllables but by the rhythmic necessity of the moment must the form of the stanzas be decided and governed.

For ten years he had laboured at this work, experimenting, painstaking, desperate, knowing that, even if he ever completed it, the world would only declare it to be a helpless imitation and mixture of the easygoing old with the ambitious new musical ideas.

The Maestro had set the pages open at the middle of a scene. Then he took from the music folio a pile of unfinished scores for the various instruments and set a metronome upon the table.

The metronome was by no means a necessity for him. He was able to take any time-measure he desired unaided. But what wine, cognac, black coffee or illicit drugs might be to another artist, this stimulating instrument was to him. Pulsing its presto through the night, it lent him wings and mastery, and its funeral measure solemnized his soul. His experience was that the sound of its beating enabled him to work steadily through a piece without interrupting himself and to maintain a uniform rate of progress.

The notes lay black and thick upon the page. It was the great moment of the

tragedy—Lear sick to death in the storm. Out of the separate stage directions in the original, 'a heath'—'another part of the heath before a hut'—'a room in a farm,' a single scene had been arranged—for which the stage directions ran: "a ruined hut—the wall in the background half fallen in—right, a wooden bench, a thunderstorm raging."

The characters in this scene were Lear, the Fool, Kent, and a figure that Verdi had invented, a crazed pilgrim who believed himself to be possessed by the devil. This unfortunate was naturally no other than Edgar, the villainous Edmund Gloster's brother, who pretended to be mad in order to protect himself. The Maestro did not think the Opera could bear the weight of secondary action, such as Shakespeare loved, and so he had cut Gloster out of the tragedy and put in the figure of the pilgrim who seemed to him necessary to balance the scene.

The action ran thus: Enter Lear and the Fool. Lear calls upon God and Nature to revenge him upon his infamous daughters. The faithful Kent enters, sees his master (who as king had cast him off) and tries to persuade him to seek a better shelter from the terrible night. The Fool utters his cynical jests and phrases. Lear's senses wander. A voice sounds suddenly out of the darkness, the voice of the possessed pilgrim, offering up prayers and vows. Lear, now in delirium, is holding a court of judgment on his daughters; he makes the pilgrim judge while the Fool and the disguised Kent are jury. The gruesome frenzy in the hut and the storm outside rise to their climax. Lear, his strength forsaking him, sinks back babbling and dies. The three others carry him to the bench and cover him silently. Curtain.

This act was a very daring one for the opera of the time. For three-quarters of an hour only four men were on the stage, all wretched in the extreme. The first was a discredited, mishandled father crazy with age and grief, the second a madman who shrieks and prays horribly, the third one who must play the fool, because his love and oversensitiveness can find no other outlet, and the fourth a noble soul, bitterly wronged, who revenges himself with the magnanimity of an archangel.

Practically speaking, there were three basses, Lear, Kent, and the Fool, and a tenor, the pilgrim, who, except in the happier first part, does not employ his voice. Moreover, there was for a whole act no opportunity for true lyrical vocalization, no choral music or melody.

Unlike most of those who write or paint, Verdi avoided originality—not because he had no original inspirations, but because, with his insight into reality, he dared not state his problems plainly. What is originality often but a despairing effort to escape the unfathomable? The deeper the roots of any artist's work are struck, the louder rises the wrath of those to whom all that has been, has been bad. His balanced and experienced judgment recognized the value, the essential uses of convention, and he could not abandon it. He had none of the pariah's hate against all that is generally esteemed; justly weighed, its practical usefulness proved, he held what was customary high. At least, until now he had done so.

Musically, the numbers were distributed as follows:

I. A recitative monologue by Lear, on the lines of the famous monologue in the second act of Rigoletto.

II. A duet between Lear and the Fool, in which the Fool sings a little ironical solo.

III. The entrance of Kent; a short, rapidly moving trio, persuading Lear to seek better shelter. His refusal.

IV. Prayers and exorcisms by the devil-ridden pilgrim. The raising of the storm in a short orchestral passage, chorus of women's voices in the upper register, leading to a short, fragmentary *a-capella* quartet composed of the pilgrim's prayers and the interjections of the others.

V. The climax of the storm. Beginning of Lear's vision and death struggle, announced in abrupt, unsustained phrases. The great final quartet

develops from the first *Andante grandioso*, through a chorale illustrative of the action to the *velocissimo* close in the death agony of the distraught Lear. The number breaks off unexpectedly in the middle; as the Fool is kneeling before the huddled, sunken form of the king, the English horn, solo, recalls the first two measures of his little song. The king is laid on the bench while the orchestra accompanies the closing scene in a melodious, retrospective finale on the deep-toned instruments.

This was the plan of the opera in the rough. In addition there was a mass of incidental music. The counterbass had not merely to fill in the pauses of the bass but to repeat its motive and movement. When the Fool sang, his song was often foreshadowed by some twelve notes on the accompanying instruments. In one place the whole orchestra had to emphasize a malediction of Lear in a mighty wave of unison. Sudden and very frequent changes of time were not avoided, nor the uneven measure.

One principle above all others lay at the Maestro's heart, one that unconsciously he had already followed in the Rigoletto quartet. In a conversation with Boito he once expressed it in these following words:

"It is not polyphony but polyvocalization that matters. All music has its origin in song, therefore the final test of all musical work must be its singing quality."

And again:

"The marvel about music is that it can say so many things at once. But the great object must always be out of the aggregation of many strains to bring a new and single strain so that out of the polyphony a higher homophony, which is melody, shall rise as the homophony of light rises out of the sevenfold polyphony of colour. In this Palestrina, Luca Marenzio, and the musicians of the *a-capella* school stand higher than Bach, who, with a sort of inspired malice, neglected to weld the flexible sweetness of his manifold music into a true homophony. Polyphony may be good, but it never rises into consciousness."

The plan of the opera was complete, its scope approved, the finished draft lay before him. But the Maestro continued to stare at the confusion of notes, returning again and again to this or that weak point which for ten years had embittered his life. Would this material prove sufficient for the shaping of his new achievement? The Maestro had asked himself the question a hundred times.

Had he indeed nothing to draw upon but this stamping mill from which the music was beaten out with such horrible regularity—the same series of notes with which he had already created twenty other father roles, the same open-mouthed *Sostenuto religioso* that Donizetti and Rossini loved to employ when they dragged God into their light-minded compositions. Had it not all fallen already into derision? Was he fit for anything now but a subordinate place in Gritti's mausoleum of composers? Was he worthy to be called even an imitator of Richard Wagner, since he could produce nothing new and very probably had no right to set himself higher than Mercadante, Pacini, Ricci, Petrella or Mabellini, who had only been a little less fortunate than he. Once he had minted this phrase: "Results never come by chance, they are ruled by a mysterious power." It was a stupid, arrogant boast. Results were ruled by a vain, meaningless chain of circumstances. How had he ever dared to measure himself with Wagner, who said in his first note more than he himself had ever learnt?

In mellow moments or moments of enthusiasm, pacing solitary through his fields at Saint Agatha, there had come to him, unsought, singing itself secretly in his ear, a melody that had seemed to him noble and full of rapture. But now that the notes lay before him, there was in them no song in the true meaning of the word, but only the noxious buzzing of an insect. Should he begone from here, but whither? What was he seeking in this city? Was such restlessness, such impulsiveness worthy of an old man? But was he really old? He felt

himself no older than at forty. Yet, yes, he was old. Nearly seventy! He must die before long. Perhaps even this year. No one would wonder at it. Two years ago his Boccanegra had been already classed as the senile close of a glorious and respected career. And now this confounded Lear! Should he leave the stuff as it was? No, no, he must show them, he must show them all, what he could do. Oh, what vanity! Did he not often say in his letters to his friends that he would never do any more serious work? And now to think better of it, to boast, to drivel! Was this devil of vanity not yet laid that destroys everything, kills all quiet satisfaction and drives every moment of the day before it with such infernal, maddening fury? Of how many of his days was this Satan still to rob him? All the birds, brought down by the hunter, lay dead upon the fields of Busseto now, only a single pair fluttered through the darkness. And for whom was it all? If he had had children—but he had no child left. Only in dreams still, he often saw the dying face of his little Icilio. No, he could do nothing for him, his son.

Was it because he was growing old that his thoughts kept rambling thus, that he could no longer concentrate on his work? Once even in the noise of the streets, in the bedlam of Paris, the ecstasy of creation would seize him, this joy of joys, filling his heart and extending every muscle, this gift of melody that was his! But now! Even when it visited him, all other things were stronger—doubt, recollection, disapprobation!

No, no! He would not give in. It must be attempted here and now. Once more the Maestro turned to the draft of the opera, once more he read through the scenes, steeling himself to work in spite of his disinclination.

No, that would never do! Never in his recollection had he heard anything so bad! It must be a mistake. His eyes must be failing.

He stood up. Suddenly calm he asked himself,

"How has it happened that I can no longer believe in it all? Who has done this to me?"

There was but one answer. It came now, involuntarily, as it had come a thousand times before—"Wagner!"

Half weeping, his heart burning, the man began to protest like a boy.

"Why must he come into the world? It was all right before. Now he torments me. I have done him no harm. He only does it to injure me. In his horrible pride he goes on as if I were nothing, as if he had never heard a note of my work (better, indeed, if he never has)—yes, all that he does is done to injure me!"

Verdi came to himself in astonishment that his grief at the long fruitlessness of years should have brought him to such a state of frenzy.

What would he have of Wagner, then? Was he envious? The German—dazzling, admired, productive in every moment, with a swarm of adoring youths around him—merely went on his own brilliant way.

A deep flush sprang into the Maestro's face. A resolution formed within him,

"I will write King Lear."

He began the work, he had actually written several bars when the seductive voice of the artist's subtlest enemy came to him: "It is late! I am not in the mood. It will go better to-morrow!"

Slowly he gathered the music together and took up again his heart-searching progress round and round the room. He came to a stand before a side table.

What bird of the air had carried his complete works here and put them under his nose to sneer at him? It could only have been the Senator. How our friends torment us by raking up our yesterdays, the everlasting, idiotic past!

Suddenly Verdi saw the red cover of a large music folio. He drew it out and read,

"Tristan and Isolde, in three acts, by Richard Wagner."

Slackly he held the music in his hand. Who had done this? The Senator. No!—An enemy? Did everybody then know that he was in Venice? As if

stunned, the Maestro remained motionless for a while. Then there came to him a fierce desire to do that which till now he had guarded himself against—to read this music, to play it ! Already he was running his finger through the pages, but at the last moment he tore himself away, opened the balcony vehemently and went out into the darkness, leaning over as if to throw this horrible gift from him into the water. Already the tide had receded several yards, but the night brings all near.

With a strong swing of his arm he could drown this Tristan in the lagoon. Quickly, with the shamed feeling of a sensitive man who has contemplated something disgraceful, Verdi returned to the room.

The thought rose within him, "Fate prepares a scourge for each of us," and once more the voice said—"Wagner ?"

Carefully he laid the book in a cabinet which he locked and put the key into his pocket.

It is scarcely surprising to know that it was Italo who had put the Tristan music in the Maestro's room.

After a long struggle with himself the Senator's full heart had brimmed over. He had let Italo into the secret, under threat of a father's curse if he betrayed it, and charged his son, whose taste was irreproachable, to give the last touches of seemliness and convenience to the apartment.

And the young Wagnerian in his missionary zeal and curiosity had added Tristan to the musical collection.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRIPPLE'S SONG

1

ANDREA GEMINIANO, MARCHESE GRITTI, always awoke at eight o'clock in the morning out of the state of suspended animation that served him for sleep. François was waiting in readiness for the moment when the slow breathing of his master was augmented and the glassy, half-opened eyes began again to revolve in their circular setting like those of a bird. The centenarian took a glass containing a strange effervescing drink from his manservant's hand—a powerful restorative compounded of vermouth, coffee and citron. Half an hour later Gritti drank two glasses of milk, but that this was woman's milk is only a legend.

Punctually at nine o'clock Carvagno entered. The relation of the doctor to his patient was as original as the patient's relation to himself. Both Gritti and Carvagno were filled with a cold, intense and impersonal ambition to make this centenarian body, whose proprietor Gritti was, last for an absurd number of years in the teeth of all natural limitations.

The brilliant doctor regarded the affair as a professional problem of the first rank, an experiment which might have inconceivable consequences. The Venetian patrician for his part was determined to live for the sake of living, the sporting mania of his class called out all his powers of endeavour.

Doctor Carvagno was a man of abrupt, informal behaviour—and the ancient formalist must often have been obliged, in the interests of his ambition, to suppress the indignation he felt at the rough directness with which the doctor allowed himself to treat him, his Excellency, the Ambassador of His Holiness the Pope.

Outwardly the doctor belonged to the broad-shouldered, thick-set Gallic type, with the small, veiled eyes and heavy jaw that indicate hidden depth of feeling and dangerous passion. To-day—the day after the Maestro's arrival

in Venice—the irascible doctor seemed particularly unceremonious in his greeting to the Marchese and immediately began to examine the red-rimmed eyes with his cold, critical glance.

"You have got through your hundred and fifth birthday well, Marchese."

"Oh, hush, hush ! . . ." cried the Marchese, who cherished many superstitions on this point. The doctor then began to question Gritti, who had all the information carefully entered in a book.

"Pulse ?"

"Fifty-two."

"We must bring it up another ten beats. The heart never lies. That heart of yours is a miracle. Temperature ?"

"Thirty-six."*

"The feeling of cold ?"

"Still there. Must go."

"Then we shall have to negotiate a loan. I advise a little extra meat in the diet and I will write a prescription as well."

Carvagno injected a blood-building mixture of his own invention. When he had finished, he carefully wiped the brown skin that hung like leather upon the skeleton of this dry and fleshless body, and the circulation quickly improved. The doctor was already in the doorway, when the clear voice of Gritti asked:

"How long do you guarantee ?"

"Six months, if nothing unforeseen occurs."

"Six months is no use! More, more!"

Without altering his verdict, Carvagno disappeared. After the exertion of this examination the old man rested in bed for the only hour of the twenty-four. Even now, however, he did not lie down, but sat propped up by many pillows. At ten o'clock, he finally made his toilet, which lasted for an hour. Although Gritti nightly appeared at the theatre dressed in the conventional evening coat of the world of fashion, his dress by day was carefully designed to show that world how little thought he gave to contemporary fashions and how graciously he was pleased to carry the distinction of his glorious past into the poor bourgeois world of to-day. Thus sublimely might a great court actor have moved through some impoverished provincial town in which he condescended to play.

Above all things he was resolved to extend and protract his condescension. He would not deny the world the honour of a single appearance, and every exit was accompanied by the promise of re-entrance. It was only this that for so long had kept the sap of life from dying entirely out of him, so potent to keep at bay the weariness and nausea of life that longs for relief in death were his two manias—age and opera. Few men, moreover, possess even half a mania, and this, too, served to distinguish him from the green and vulgar crowd that merely fed and multiplied. If he had no appetites to satisfy—the one capacity that keeps ordinary men from sinking into utter insignificance—yet he had his own great aim to pursue, his monstrous aim that outweighed all desire and all satisfaction. Only with the greatest caution did François, the frail old jester of this king, invest his master with such garments as had been laid aside. So cleverly did Gritti constantly calculate and economize the expenditure of his strength that he knew how, with the slightest possible expenditure of the life-force, to slip smoothly into his clothes.

He assumed the breeches, wide and fastening easily by means of straps, cut in a forgotten fashion, the immaculate waistcoat, and the long-skirted, coffee-coloured, walking coat. The ceaselessly working throat was encircled by a collar shaped to allow the fullest freedom and completed by a swelling cravat. Finally, François handed him his lorgnon that, like all the rest of his appurtenances, was a necessity and not used as it generally is to-day, out of affectation or vanity.

Gritti walked through the gallery that contained his collection, lingering

* Degrees Centigrade. Equal to 96.8 Fahr.

longest in the room of the singers, looking carefully at a portrait here and there, and seeing that all were free from the slightest speck of dust. Then he inspected the room where the theatre programmes hung, changing the position of several of the sheets for no visible reason.

His life was good to him. He saw no cause why he should give it up at the bidding of time.

The hour for exercise arrived. François brought him a wide, flowing cloak with a deep collar, in which the suggestion of costume was stronger than ever, and the ebony stick with its ivory knob. Last of all, the Marchese placed a huge dark grey silk hat of a pattern that he called Austrian on his polished, high-towering head.

The gondola with two rowers in livery was waiting below. The old Marchese ordered the black coupé to be removed before he entered the beautiful, old-world, metal-mounted barge, the only water-conveyance that he ever used.

The side canals were avoided. Propelled by energetic strokes, the gondola glided through the green water of the Grand Canal to the landing on the Piazetta. All the gondoliers, the aged, greedy hangers-on with the grappling irons, the loiterers and common folk, greeted the Marchese, one of the standing features of their city, with servile familiarity. The few visitors who were there at this season came forward eagerly, anxious not to miss the sight of still another curiosity of travel.

The centenarian landed, restraining all signs of weakness more severely than ever, and began his daily triumphal progress, his erect gait effectively contrasted with the infirm, aged steps of François.

The cannon of San Giorgio boomed the hour of noon over the crowded square. In daily repeated consternation the thousand pigeons rose with cries of mortal fear, their memories too short to accustom them to the harmlessness of the sound. Wildly the curtain of doves with its folds of beating wings rose from the four corners of the square as it had risen yesterday and would rise to-morrow. Not otherwise to the whip of war respond the unthinking nations whose memories are too short to stretch from one noon of history to another.

Every day, precisely as the cannon shot resounded, the Marchese appeared between the first and second flagstaffs in front of the Basilica and entered the open square. Before the pigeons had settled again, he had turned to the right towards the Procuration.

The great world of Venice and its retinue had chosen this hour to enjoy its daily sunbath on the square. Many men, young and old, sat in the four classic cafés of the Piazza drinking their vermouth or other apéritifs. The ladies, who did not, in these days, permit themselves to sit down in the strictly masculine atmosphere of the square, promenaded with that provocative languor which Venetian women know how to make so alluring.

To the womanhood of polite Venice, whom the dream of a celestial sexlessness had not yet spoiled or even dawned upon, this midday hour served as a fashion parade, pre-eminence in which was attained by a disdainful elegance.

Gritti was greeted with the eager curiosity which assails every hero of Art or sport who appears in public. With repugnance he gazed upon the spectacle, no longer enchanting, which the mere fact of its mutability rendered contemptible to him. With unbending mien, like a knight fulfilling a high mission, he reared himself above these swarming ephemeræ whom destruction had marked for its own. Group after group paid their tribute to his existence. He hardly spoke, but stared straight before him. Never raising the enormous hat, he stood, when he was approached, like a sovereign asserting his prerogative of word and place. At a respectful distance François imitated the rigid gestures of his master, although—for so high an art is not easily acquired—not without occasional lapses into weakness.

Once, indeed, the Marchese showed some interest in a conversation, for he stood longer than was his custom in the group that was talking of the Carnival season at La Venice theatre, and of the Opera company in which a notable

young singer, Margherita Dezorzi, was appearing. A young count made some casual remark about Richard Wagner, which Gritti did not understand.

"Who is Wagner?"

"But, dear Marchese!"

"Ah! I know now! He is the fellow who refused to compose a ballet in two acts for the Imperial Opera in Paris. I know the scandal! Some caprice about ballets in one act!—No, there is no place for your Wagner in my collection!"

And with that the audience ended. Gritti passed on.

The one gleam of sunshine of that dull Adriatic winter's day broke through the clouds and streamed lavishly over the cupolas and the whole checkered mass of that time-stained Slavonic house of God, the church of Saint Mark. The sky was obscured and only one unearthly beam of sunlight pierced the heavy air, but the church and the little space before it glowed with the light of many candles. And, as over unmown meadows, lying dead on a sunless summer day, the coming of a single sunbeam calls to life a thousand insects that dance with an organ-toned hum of praise in the light-quickened womb of the air, here amid the flying doves a crowd of children danced joyously in the sun.

There were children of all kinds, classes and ages. Foreign children—little Englishmen and Englishwomen—characteristically quiet and subdued in manner, bought packages of grain from the maize seller, laying their money slowly and quietly in his hand without a word, and, because it was the thing to do, solemnly fed the swarm of greedy birds.

But to the merry Venetian boys and girls, the feeding of the doves was an art that, like another, must observe its laws and submit to criticism. The heavy pigeons hovered with fluttering wings over their hands, perched on their shoulders and pecked the grain with the intimacy of fellow countrymen.

A little aside from the well-to-do children, the children of the poor thronged round the church. They gazed with the hostile, half-resentful, half-wistful eyes of the juvenile proletariat at their well-clad contemporaries. Though more than one of these ragamuffins had a pocketful of broken bread, some nameless inhibition, deeply and long implanted, prevented the unfortunates from approaching the charmed circle and besmirching the fortunate with their presence. But before long, when the clocks of the hotels and palaces had called the clean-scented, milk-and-sugar-fed flock to table, the turn of the street Arabs came, and, swarming over the deserted place, they strewed their dry crumbs before the indifferent, satiated birds.

As the Marchese noted the children in the middle of the fleeting patch of sunshine, he was drawn with strangely hastened, almost covetous steps to the spot, and stood there in the sun.

Oh, Sun, thou medium of Godhead, through whom all material phenomena are brought to being!

Such an aid to materialization was a necessity of growing urgency to the centenarian, whose material parts were protesting against their unnaturally protracted incorporation. Gritti knew that to absorb these rays for a while was a more effective antidote to the deathward tendency than any which Doctor Carvagno could furnish. He stood there like some naked chalk cliff that suddenly, under the burning midday sun, feels the pricking of life, the springing of a blade of grass or a little flowering plant, from its long dried cracks and crevices. And then the children!

To the children there at play he was already a familiar figure whose uses were recognized, for he dispensed among them every day a number of packages of sweets, which François bought regularly from a confectioner. After the distribution of the sweets, the Marchese took one of the children by the hand, asked after his parents, laughed in his slow fashion and began with quiet pride his stereotyped phrase:

"You see, I am about a hundred years older—"

The children stared at him uncomprehendingly. In his shrunken, cold, brown hand he held the soft, tender hand of the child. It was the only voluptuous sensation that he could now experience.

One after the other he tried those sweet childish hands with their individual peculiarities and differences that increased as character developed.

Whether the hand he held belonged to a boy or girl made no difference. They were all pleasant. Whether soft or already roughened in play, whether lean and nervous, or soft and warm, dry or moist, the vital influence flowed from all alike.

Gritti smoothed and patted and stroked the little fingers, the haughty death's-head purring and babbling, the breath coming hissing from the gigantic nose. It was a warming, revivifying experience that quickened the blood-stream, the necessary dose of joy that every life demands.

To-day at a little distance from the pigeon-feeding children, patrician and plebeian, stood a boy whose beauty was so remarkable that it seemed as if he must be marked out for some special destiny. Particularly angelic was the glory of the silver-fair hair in the sunlight. The boy was well dressed in good, dark clothes, with a white, scolloped collar. Only the shoes were noticeably worn and old.

The mother herself gave a well-dressed impression, though when one looked closer her clothes had a home-made air. The young, plain-featured face bore the look of settled care that the faces of so many German townswomen assume soon after marriage.

Gritti, struck by the beauty of the child, came up to them.

"What is your name ?"

Only after the question was repeated did the boy answer, turning quickly away.

"Hans Fischböck."

"Ah ! a German boy. I know your country. Will you speak to me in German ?"

"I speak Italian."

The boy's voice was very low and reluctant.

"And how old are you ?"

"Five last week."

"Last week. Ah, bravo, bravo ! Then I am exactly a hundred years older than you."

The Marchese Gritti took the shrinking little hand and pressed it. What a joy ! Its warmth and softness were perfect.

"What would you like, Giovanni ? Would you like to feed the pigeons ?"

A look of eager surprise flashed into the eyes of the child. Apparently his mother had refused him the money to buy the grain.

Clasping the stimulating little hand, Gritti bought the maize, François counting out the soldi. Hans began to feed the pigeons. But suddenly, seized with shyness or fear, he lost all interest in the pursuit, and throwing the grain hastily on the ground, ran back to his mother.

The Marchese followed the child. It had always been his firm conviction that all beauty must be paid for; he took out a ducat and pressed it into the little hand. Frau Fischböck quickly noticing the motion took the money from the child angrily, and without vouchsafing him a word, returned it to the old man.

She drew the child hastily away and turned with him into the arched gateway of the Orolgio. Then suddenly, as if regret had come too late, her face, with its smooth Madonna brow, changed and tears rose involuntarily to her eyes.

Puzzled, the child kept on repeating:

"But what is it, Mummy, what is it ?"

The Marchese, in the quick unfaithfulness of the aged to the passing moment, soon forgot the lovely boy. He took another little hand in his to compensate

himself. For a long time the tall, upright figure might be seen, in its theatrically old-world dress, with a swarm of children round him and the pigeons circling high overhead.

An hour later when the sunlight had faded again, the centenarian sat before his table, and, chewing each mouthful thirty times with iron determination, he ate the excellent beefsteak that Dr. Carvagno had prescribed. The meat had been carefully broiled and afterwards passed through a mincing machine so that the eating should not consume too much of the old man's strength. With his steak, in tiny sips, Andrea Gritti drank half a glass of Bordeaux.

2

About eleven o'clock, Giuseppe Verdi, eluding the discreet eyes of the hotel servants, quietly left the house.

The strangeness of finding himself in Venice, of having thus interrupted the even flow of his life, and being here unrecognized, alone and unhaloed like an obscure beginner, this strangeness was still strong upon him. He recalled a biographical extract that someone had sent him in which he was pictured as a patriarch surrounded by his offspring, at one with himself and his art, peacefully enjoying the harvest of his days and taking his well-earned rest. How false and fulsome like all the flattery of the press !

After a restless night, full of painful self-analysis, and confused, ambitious dreams, he walked doubtfully like a survivor of shipwreck, through the streets of that island in the lagoon, with a sense of physical youthfulness, as if after some fiasco of his student days, as if there lay behind him, not a score of famous operas and more, but the negligible beginnings of an opening career.

Unceasingly there strove in his blood, like the germ of a malady, a fever of self-distrust that would not be quenched. In spite of the many important interests in his life, among which his husbandry alone had raised him to a unique position among Italian landowners, the Maestro was not by nature industrious. His chief pleasure was to pace backwards and forwards through his room at Saint Agatha, revolving no practical scheme, but seeing only his wild and constantly changing visions. The moments of his life were not crammed with action like the lives of so many men who seek thus to allay the secret gnawing of the past. At heart he hated work, and forced himself into it with the unnatural sternness of self-discipline.

The root of all the despair of the past ten years was simply that his inspiration had failed, that where once he had only to pursue and seize the potent thronging creatures of his imagination, he now had to toil and to invent laboriously.

The scantier a gift is, the sooner will it be driven to retreat within itself in order to collect and organize its forces, to focus its strength upon one point. But he had not been able to divert the stream of his energies completely into the role of farmer, successful as he was in agriculture. The secret spring that fed his life was too rich and stormy to be turned thus aside, the overflowing reservoir was continually refilled with clear or troubled water whether outlet was provided for it or not. The figure of a fountain that comes so readily to hand here is not without its justification. It rose to the mind of Verdi himself who, avoiding the Piazza, plunged into the side streets of the Merceria. It was not so much that he definitely formed the idea of a well in his mind as that the daily welling of its waters was part of his bodily life. Unbidden, the thought formed itself in his mind: "There are many places on earth where fountains spring, but only one fountain-head of water. When one stream flows deep and strong, another dries. Whoever may suffer, so it is !"

The Maestro recalled another period in his life when there had been a similar pause in his productivity. Yes, there it lay in the silent past. In the space of a few weeks, three coffins had been borne from his house: Margherita and the two children. And he had, nevertheless, to fulfil his contract to write a comic opera for Merelli. Tired to death, sick, beside himself with grief, he had pieced

out the opera from a collection of old numbers, exercises in part writing from his studies under Lavigna. The result was no better and no worse than any of the rest of the comic operas that followed the fashion set by *Il Barbiere*. Pathetic songs for the high voices and rapid thundering volleys of notes for the comic basses. This opera proved to be his one positive failure. On the evening that it was presented the public were like wild beasts.

The hypnotic laws of cause and effect had been too strong for him. "The man whose will is enfeebled, whose courage and power of resistance are gone, is lost!" It had been then as it was now with him. Empty and spiritless he had put all ambition from him for ever. It seemed to him now a harder thing for him to have relinquished his career then, before his fortieth year, his strength still unabated, than it was to do so to-day, when the weight of years lay heavier upon him. Two things had brought him through these former days of grinning misery: first, his feverish, incessant reading of execrable French novels, and then his untiring thought-deadening tramping through the streets of Milan. For days at a time, outside and inside the walls of the town, he would walk on and on without once turning back, without once sitting down. And, behold, to-day as then he felt the same impulse in limbs that age had not yet robbed of their vigour, to walk and walk and walk.

In this fierce unquiet tramping, there was none of the pleasure in walking or riding which at other times sent him out to wander through his fields or walk from Genoa to Acquasola, but only something to be escaped from, something to be sought.

The sound of the Venetian streets assailed the Maestro, that sound which seems to be filled, not only with voices and traffic, but also with colours and smells. Everywhere stood the cuttle-fish sellers, with their smoking kettles out of which they scooped the Calamari that hung from the spoon like red scalded human limbs. In the shop windows all the smaller fry of the sea lay stacked, shrimps, crawfish, crabs; and sardines closely packed in oil. On the open butchers' stalls hung red quarters of oxen and the halved, hollow bodies of calves that, like half-demolished houses, seemed as if they could never have harboured a living being.

The drinking booths of the sea-city were thronged. Over the fronts above the tapped casks one could read on white plates—Brandy, Rum, Whisky, and the names of strong wines. In the half-artistic, half-commercial darkness of hundreds of antiquarian shops, lay heaps of curiosities, genuine and spurious, in whose alluring metal work seemed to lie an almost human fascination. In the doors of the houses and entries, and before the little news-stands, the sensation-loving Italian people scanned the innumerable journals that were one of the visible results of the union and deliverance of the kingdom. The great thoughts and impulses and actions of the past had degenerated into the chauvinistic spirit that was now gaining ground in Italy as in the rest of Europe. At the busiest street crossings the journalism of the nation lay on the news-vendors' little handleless wagons, a medley of all that was meaningless and vapid; soiled and still uncut books with hideously coloured title pages—the best sellers of the street bookstall—an extraordinary work upon astrology, some ravishing extracts from the works of Metastasio, and all the popular authors who, in that country, are often real men of genius.

Following an old habit, the Maestro lingered before these bookstands and smiled as he saw everywhere the texts of his operas, the far from classic verse of poor Francesco Maria Piave, in great demand.

Hardly noticing where he was, Verdi had crossed the square where stood the pedestal on which in a few weeks' time the statue of Goldoni was to be placed: he left the Rialto on his left and entered the Corso Victor Emanuele, a street which, for Venice, is unusually wide. Here the town had shed all its foreign affectations. The crowd surged outward and backward in two streams, and from the mass of humanity there rose a mingled odour of oil, of pastry, of wine-laden breath, of sulphur and of fish.

The Maestro tried to fix his thoughts on Lear and to concentrate on the vision of the court of justice. The motive was already there, all that was wanted now was the awakening of that creative ecstasy which had so often come to him before, catching at his breath, and drawing a veil before his eyes. Only thus and not otherwise, not by taking thought, not by combination, could melody be brought to birth, for *birth* it must be. He might reach out his hand, swift and sure as it was to speed on their way the notes in which melody should be enshrined, but it had always been in vain unless there sprang from some source other than physical within him, the breath of inspiration. He had always found that the inventions of his brain (though they might often seem more desirable than the true inspiration) never proved capable of truly embodying melody. Even when he tried to employ the false invention he could not, it fell useless from his hand. And in such moments when he remained powerless to bring to being the creations that he willed, when he could *create* nothing, he felt himself good for nothing.

"Shall I die without once knowing that strange joy again?" he thought, and at that moment, out of the mysterious flux in which the life of our spirit moves, a new inspiration dawned in the Maestro's heart.

A troop of fisherfolk was passing. First went a huge red-haired man pitted by small-pox, unquestionably the leader. Behind him a sunburnt fellow, with hands that hung down like weights as if they were too heavy or diseased. This man's face wore a foolish embarrassed smile—embarrassed perhaps at daring to wander idle through the holiday streets. But behind the uneasy smile lay a look of angry frustration which it barely concealed, the frustrated desire to set the four corners of Venice alight in an orgy of feasting and drunkenness. This group turned Verdi's thoughts into another strain.

"Why do we write all our operas in costume, describing unreal or purely romantic feelings in an unreal period? If I were only younger! If only I were not finished! That fellow Zola is a great artist. Could one not write an opera where instead of a falsetto owl in woollen cap this red-headed blackguard should appear with the other behind him in the distance? Would it not make a melodrama newer and more startling than Siegfried or the Nibelungen? Oh, what idle stuff I have wasted my days upon!"

As if a voice had called to him suddenly, the Maestro looked up and read the name of the street that turned off in front of him on the left: Calle larga Vendramin.

"The land entrance of his palace must lie down there. But what does it matter to me?"

Still Verdi turned into the narrow street and went on reluctantly. Before him rose the back wall of the Vendramin. The palace with its wings and main body resembled a small village, but of these nothing could be seen because a high Renaissance wall, topped by architectural pyramids, obstructed the view. The great mirror-like surfaces of the two huge windows of the lower story sparkled in the sun that just then broke through the mists of the Adriatic. It seemed to the Maestro as if behind this window a piano was being played, but the sound that reached his ear was so faint that he did not know whether it was a hallucination or reality.

Suddenly and for the first time the question rose clear before him.

"Shall I call upon Wagner, send in my card to him? . . . stand before him, speak with him?"

Hardly had the thought formed than a gust of anger seized him as if he had himself wounded his own pride. "I to go to him, who has slighted me, who has talked of my 'trickling Cantilena!' Never! Never!"

The first voice would not let itself be silenced.

"Have I not, in reality, come to Venice for this visit? Would it not be a wonderful experience to speak with this man? Help me, perhaps?"

And the other voice:

"How could it help me, if I cannot help myself?"

"Still, it would help if it took away this bitterness, the torment that his name has held for twenty years. And then, he would see *me*. He would know me for what I am."

"Oh ! am I all my life to be the whimpering boy dreading the schoolmaster's hand on his ear ? Do I only wear the mask of a cannibal because my flesh shrinks from wounds ? What have I to seek from this man ? Nothing ! Nothing !"

Nevertheless Verdi drew nearer to the door as he spoke, and lo ! it was opened.

His heart beat like that of a frightened boy. But he only saw a well-dressed man coming out, who swung his hat low as if in deferential leave-taking. Then there stood before him nothing but the house and the porter who came idly out and stared at him with a slow appraising look as if summing up his probable position in the world. Verdi quickly assumed the indifferent air of a passer-by, looked straight and sharply at the man, and quickly turned to retrace his steps along the Calle larga Vendramin, as if he had just discovered that he was in a cul-de-sac.

3

From the hour when Italo had thrown himself weeping at Bianca's feet, he was attentiveness and tenderness itself to her, bringing her presents and no longer leaving her to await his tardy arrival. Yet, at heart, he knew that all this was but the remorseful amends made by a bad conscience. Daily he felt himself farther removed from Bianca, and even began, he knew not why, to fear her.

She herself was greatly altered. There were no more stormy scenes, she left him perfectly free and had even become reconciled to his Wagner worship. Often when she held his hands and gazed long into his eyes there was a look in the inscrutable depths of her own that he could hardly bear to meet.

Her violence, her irritable capriciousness had now quite disappeared. She had become grave, and no longer tried nervously to dissemble her sense of approaching catastrophe. The apprehension, the certainty even, of her immolation pervaded all her being, and she, who had been so different, became slow and heavy in all her movements. All her fashionable manners and accomplishments had fallen from her now.

Italo felt how pathetic her changed appearance and state were, but they also made him fear her. She was no longer the doctor's wife who had given him such an exultant sense of youth and of delightful, dangerous adventure. She was the noble peasant woman from Portoguaro, climbing the mountain path with a basket of grapes on her head. A true daughter of Earth, simpler and more real than he, free from the scheming vanities that pursued him through the days; one who, in his unnatural ecstasies, could no longer companion him.

However tenderly he might behave to her to save himself from self-reproach, Bianca, the mother, had become a higher being to him and, as such, to be feared. Harsher emotions, too, mingled in his fear—repugnance and even hate. For it is only from afar that we can honour what is higher than ourselves; to come near to it is unendurable, it wounds our self-esteem.

Inwardly Italo, in his frustrated search for pleasure, blamed Bianca for having caused their love to come to this unhappy issue, for having shorn it of all joy and pride until every kiss was bought with tears. Was he not too young for such a burden as this ? Why must he, whose friends were still piping on the meadows of life, toil up the mountain side already bent beneath his cross ? As he sat by Bianca's side at times, gentle and earnest towards her, he felt in every limb the fearful strain of remaining there, the over-mastering impulse to fly from the spot. And when he reviewed the situation in his trained and cultivated mind, how his egoism, which till now had never suffered a check, rebelled and rose against it.

Did she, Bianca, guess how it was with him ? No, that must never be. His

heart was too tender ever to let her know all. As long as it might last, he must continue to lead this tragic life.

Bianca had of late become very devout. She went to Mass, and not on Sundays only; she had confessed and taken communion. Her spirit, under this religious urgency, became still more remote from him.

Carvagno was seldom at home; when he was there his thoughts seemed to be occupied elsewhere and he avoided being alone with Bianca.

One morning Italo entered a church where hung a picture he wished to see. Bianca was there. As she knelt before a crudely draped and painted figure of the Madonna, the young man's heart smote him. How far removed from him was this woman kneeling there in primitive worship before the waxen idol of the ignorant. What had this praying figure in common with him? It was the first time that he had not sprung instantly to her side in the irresistible longing of the lover to be near the beloved. Unnoticed by her he left the church, leaving her for ever.

Fate, in its love of sharp contrast, so willed it that, in company somewhere the same evening, he made the acquaintance of Margherita Dezorzi.

4

To his own annoyance, the Maestro felt a slight disturbance of his nerves which he could not overcome as he pursued his way. Suddenly he heard some one speak to him, and the impertinence angered him for a moment. Then he recognized the old ticket-porter of La Fenice, Dario, and his annoyance passed. The garrulous old man spoke with a stammering intensity that was very difficult to follow. The Maestro walked on only half hearing, as if from behind a hundred doors, the downpour of words that pursued him.

"I am silent, O Signor Maestro, I have been silent and will be silent! Do not blame me for it! They have dismissed me! Think of it, dismissed me! A pension! That is always the word when they want to cheat the poor. I may be old, but what of that? I have a family. And I have been a good servant—forty years I have served the theatre and music faithfully. The Maestro knows it."

Verdi looked at him for a moment quietly and earnestly. It did not seem strange to him that the old serving man should say as he himself might have done: "I have served the theatre and music faithfully."

In the sincerity and humility of his nature he did not hold his own work in any very high esteem at that moment. His austerity softened and a tone of fellowship crept into his words: "So? You have a family, Dario?"

The sudden kindness in the great man's voice overwhelmed the other and with tears in his eyes he stammered—

"Signor Maestro, the world knows, everybody knows, that you are one of God's angels."

And then—

"Family? Yes, indeed! The wife—mother—her wits are not right. My daughter—she works. But my Mario, my poor Mario, he is a wonder!"

"Well, what about Mario?"

"Oh, Signor, Signor! I have heard them all in these forty years—Mirate, Guasco, Tamberlik, Colletti, every one of them! They get their gold counted out to them on the table with a low bow. I myself have often carried it for the secretary in his little bag when he went to them in their dressing rooms after the performance. But, believe me, not one of them has the voice that my Mario has."

The old man became very humble. All his presumption disappeared as, timid and hesitating, he invited the Maestro to his home that lay near by. "Nobody would be about—and even if they killed him . . . who the honoured guest was.—The Maestro to hear my poor Mario! Oh, what good fortune!"

Verdi never assumed the distant manner that the bourgeoisie affect when he talked with "the people." That mixture of condescension and uncertainty towards the masses was completely foreign to him.

His youth had been spent among the people.

Brought up in a ruinous cottage in the hamlet of Roncole where, in the smoky darkness of the room that was shop and home combined, his father in shirt-sleeves, and his mother in the field-worker's cap, had served wine and sold salt, tobacco, coffee and polenta, he had hardly had a shoe on his foot up to his tenth year. And when, later, his father's scanty savings had brought music within his reach, what had he been but a country musician? True, he no longer lived in the village, and the market town of Busseto seemed a mighty Metropolis to him, but the ale he drank in the workshop of Pugnatta, the clogmaker, was even weaker than the brew at home.

And his youth? To bed at midnight and out again three or four hours later to walk to Roncole in time for early Mass. This earned him the high sounding title of organist, for which, hardly thirteen years old, he risked his life in the darkness of the December nights.

There were weddings, christenings and funerals to attend every week, but the yearly salary of a hundred francs made up for all. Daily he walked back to the town, for the little that he could learn was only to be learned there. And later still, as the conductor of the so-called "Philharmonic Company of Busseto" he had tramped from house to house, from village to village, in a yearly begging tour, pleading the cause of music before unwilling doors.

And what was it but the scraping fiddle of the wandering musician Bagasset, that thin hungry consumptive son of stout, well-fed peasants, which had first as a child enraptured him? It was with the fate of Bagasset, the frost-bitten least-welcome customer of the house, that Carlo Verdi, the inn-keeper, used to threaten his son, seeking to dissuade him from such an unprofitable vocation as music.

And his first teacher when his studies began—the brave, broken-down, witless, quarrelsome Baistrocchi? Did ever a musician of his learning-mad generation sink lower than he? Verdi used often to say: "I had to find out the chord of C major for myself."

What monstrous hardships, what high endeavours lay in these memories! How easy had their study of harmony, counterpoint and thorough bass been made by the aid of concerts and books for the others who entered the conservatorium with him. Convention, which the advent of athletics dethroned, was the constant object of their scorn: they hated it like spoiled children who loathe their wholesome every-day food and long greedily for forbidden dainties. For him, Columbus-like, it was a new world to be conquered, the America of the customary. Nothing was his without struggle. He accepted this as the common fate of his class. Music was his trade, a business to be learnt. He did not dully accept the commonplace, but attacked it with energetic zest, for it was not commonplace to him, it was convention, the form in which new and unsuspected virtue dwelt. It was this that had raised him up in later years to rescue opera as it lay in the article of death. Rossini and Donizetti had warbled for the charming fashionable opera-loving world of Andrea Gritti, but he, without open or verbal revolt, sang for a new public, the people. He was not concerned with Society, graciously dispensing its favours upon Art, nor with the new cult of the intellectual, which was as strange and hateful as the devil to him; his business was to utter that which had been put into his heart by some power he could not control or gainsay.

The landowner of Saint Agatha had sprung far from his first beginnings, but it was a true growth, that of this mighty, dark-foliaged tree. He might, indeed, be called a member of that very small, ideal class who belong to no class, because their greatness oversteps all distinctions. The song that stirred in the highest branches of the tree might float unheard above the people's head, but they and its deepest roots were always one.

Lonely as Giuseppe Verdi's life on his estate was, there was not a cottage or a workshop that he did not visit from time to time.

While the Senator, the man of Revolution in '48, was now quite indifferent to the labour question, Verdi's letters to Count Arrivabene often show an instinc-

tive, prophetic socialism, as if some of the free spirit of the great days had survived in him. But this social spirit of his had in it nothing political or theoretical, it expressed itself solely in feeling and action. He erected factories, workshops and creameries on his land which were a cause of much loss to him, but it was only to provide work for the people and prevent them leaving the district. In a time of deep commercial depression he informed Arrivabene triumphantly, "Not a man has left my village." And while æsthetic crazes were nullifying the spirit of the time more and more, the Italian composer, an elder brother of Tolstoy, was writing:

"The misery of the lower classes is great, gigantically great, and you must realize, you men of the city, that if foresight is not shown and help is not given either from above or beneath, in spite of you, an upheaval is bound to come."

The Maestro, then, did not speak to the people in the empty, superficial manner of those whom class distinction ruled, yet anyone seeing him in such company would have said in his heart: This man is a king. A king because he was distinguished by the godhead of his art which alone raised him so high.

It may yet be, perhaps, when all false ideas of nation, class and government have been chased away, that men shall rise to the conception of such sovereignty as shall rest upon nothing outward or meaningless—a tree shat does not strive to detach itself from and rise above the undergrowth, but stands rooted within it, one and whole from root to crown.

And so, like a king, the Maestro accepted Dario's invitation. No one seeing him would have guessed that in these days he was passing through one of the heaviest trials of his life. Since he had been a landlord, he enjoyed, as has been said, the visits he paid to the houses of his tenants.

To leave the principal streets of any part of Venice is to plunge at once into gaily-coloured, noise-filled scenes of the bitterest poverty. The more free-flowering the nature of the seed the more easily the plant withers. There is a mysterious and inevitable tendency traceable all through the history of mankind—in the North the individual tends to become solitary, and in the South gregarious. Every zone at some period in the natural course of its cosmic life reaches the climax of its productiveness, and the curve begins to recede. There was a time when Venice produced only rich and noble and patrician sons. A thousand palaces announce it. And in the ancient, narrow Rio di San Fosca, through which Dario and the Maestro passed, they stood by side, mighty dark-hued monuments of the great period of the purple. But the tall Gothic or column-flanked windows had been built up with brick, they stared before them like blind scars. There were open wounds, too, scratched and torn everywhere, but the dark portals decorated with pictures and figures, caryatides and lions, rose sound and tall as ever. The lifeless stone womb of the street now enshrined a swarming parti-coloured life. One palace after another was flagged with family washing stretched on a line. From the broken window frames head after head of tousled women's hair protruded. Cries rang out, shouts of laughter, cascades of words, and each found an echo.

In the doorways children had pitched complete gipsy encampments. In tireless confusion they wrestled, played and circled in their grimy, coloured rags. Snatches of song, abuse, greetings and curses filled the air. In their innumerable activities all seemed to know each other, and even the boatmen pushing their craft along the canal sent up hoarse gurgling cries to their acquaintance out of the muddy water.

The Maestro felt in no way oppressed by this cloud of the humanity out of which his own light had long since flashed. He stood amused and watchful while the following scene enacted itself before him:

Two women were quarrelling furiously. Their hair was flying about their distorted faces and their voices shrilled.

"Oh! Oh! The whole world knows, you dirty baggage, that your brat belongs to the priest of San Marcuola."

"Liar! Liar! Look to yourself, you old witch! You are only jealous

because you are old ! Would you spread tales about me, because you are a rusty kettle ?"

"I may be old but it's you who are a witch. The poor young priest is your victim !"

"See that black mug ! Who would look at you ! Even your old man's stomach turns at you."

"Whose stomach turns at me, you limb of Satan, you . . .?"

And the woman snatching the infant from her breast triumphantly held it over her head like a trophy, on which the child yelled wildly and the crowd followed its example. The other did not give up the struggle. With the calm of a great general retrieving a dangerous position she surveyed the mother contemptuously.

"Well, God knows how you two scratched up that poor bird between you, but they do say that you have to go begging other women's milk, you dry stick !"

The mother, stung in her tenderest nerve, screamed shrilly and, raising her heavy breast out of her blouse, she sent a stream of milk into the face of the priest's beloved. The magnificence and passion of this retort was hailed with enthusiasm by the onlookers. They applauded her like a great tragedian, with wild shouts of "Brava ! Brava !" An old beggar man with sparkling eyes looked with approval at the victor and passed his verdict on her stock with the complacency of an authority.

"Yes, she comes from the wilds, from Romagna, does Sorecca !"

On the street level in one of those crazy courts full of children, washing, and the hammering of workmen, lay the home of the old pensioner of the theatre. As he opened the battered, latchless door with the great man by his side, the unabashed neighbours came running up like children, to watch the Maestro's entry.

The room in which he now stood was so dark that Verdi could see nothing but the little hearth with the copper chimney rising from it. On this hearth a wretched, phantom-like being was working, but ceased when she saw the visitor, as if in fear. With some unintelligible word to his daughter the feverishly-excited Dario quickly disappeared and as quickly reappeared, now dressed in the green coat of his theatre livery.

Casting anxious looks on every side, he continued his compliments, all his boldness gone.

"You honour us, you honour me, Excellency ! Oh, where is my wife, where is my martyr of a wife ? Be pleased to come into the room, sir, out of this dark place !"

Crossing the uneven floor with care, the Maestro went into the inner room, typical of the dwellings of the city poor. It contained a double bed covered with a faded counterpane, two small windows on the ledges of which some cracked bottles stood, a whole gallery of sacred pictures on the wall, and a lamp standing under a Madonna made a tiny altar with all sorts of sacred decorations.

"Here's my wife ! You'll excuse her, your Excellency ! These ten years now she has been—you understand—mixed."

He made a gesture.

"You understand ? It's all because she had learned how to read and write —a thing she had no use for at all. People are like that nowadays. They must always have print to look at. Oh dear me, dear me ! Why was I doomed to marry a scholar ?"

Pushed forward by Dario a truly strange apparition now stood before the Maestro. The woman was so bowed by age or sickness that the hipbones were bent outwards and stood at a painful angle to the line of the back. A few solitary white hairs were smoothed over the reddish nakedness of her scalp and fastened in a pitiful knot. A thick blue film completely covered the eyes which, in spite of their unnatural brightness, seemed to be blind. The old woman greeted the Maestro with refinement in her words and voice, but spoke hurriedly, as if, having at last found an equal with whom speech was possible, she could not wait

for ceremony. She made a rapid curtsy and smiled knowingly as if to indicate that she knew more about the visitor than he suspected. Her words flowed on quickly as she began to recite a story about her dear father, and of a delightful ride in a carriage in which he played the guitar and charmed all the people out of their houses to dance to his music. But she herself sat in her father's castle. She related this adventure not as if it were an early recollection, but as if it had all happened yesterday and she was still the happy child. Before she had finished that story, she had turned into the heroine of shady romance in which figured a well-known great personage whom she named——

"Enough, old woman, enough!" Dario put his hand over her mouth. With the resignation of a captive princess in poverty she became silent with a look at the Maestro as if she whispered to a fellow conspirator, "There, you see for yourself!"

"It's all because of the books, Excellency!" asserted Dario, as if he were excusing some trifling complaint. "And here is my Mario."

The Maestro saw a young man sitting by a table before the window. Mario's face with its fine, rather sharp nose and mild mouth and forehead, was one of real nobility. His beautifully modelled ear, a shell of the most wonderful finish, was turned at every sound.

"Nina! Nina!" the old theatre servant cried nervously. "Bring a seat for his Excellency! Quick! And that rug over Mario's knees!"

For the first time Verdi now saw that the young man with the beautiful head was completely crippled, and squatted on horribly short and useless limbs. A sense of the appalling horror of life rose in his throat like a nausea.

Nina, poor girl, upon whom the whole weight of this unhappy family fell, came forward listlessly and gloomily. She spread a rug over her brother, and, placing a wooden chair for the guest, retired. Again Dario busied himself in explaining the misfortune of his house, jealously anxious that no blame should attach to himself.

"What else could you expect? It was her book-learning, you understand, that made his legs like this."

Silently, with heaviness in his heart, the Maestro turned to Mario, who was bent again over his work.

He was one of those skilled handworkers who fashion extremely tasteless views of Venice out of a mosaic of glass. With amazing, uninterrupted speed Mario fitted the tiny multicoloured pieces of glass into position with pincers and fixed them with a tap of his light mallet. Fast as his thin fingers flitted backwards and forwards the picture grew so slowly and imperceptibly that the onlooker could not tell whether it represented the Duomo or some other building.

"How long do you work on a picture like that, Mario?"

"Two or three days."

"And for whom?"

"A manufacturer in Murano."

"What does the manufacturer pay you for a picture?"

"Three lire!"

When he had given his quiet answers Mario turned to his work again. He picked up a new piece and fitted it exactly into its place.

His father came close to him wheedlingly, in his green coat.

"My son! You may make your fortune! You see this gentleman! He is an Excellency. You will sing, my boy, won't you? You will sing! It's long, long since we have heard you."

The young man shook himself and made a wordless sign of impatience with his hand. His father recommenced:

"Now, Mario! Don't break my heart. Oh, if you only knew! This gentleman, this visitor, is an Excellency, a great Director. Your hour has struck. Sing! Sing! You must."

This mysterious, unexplained optimism only made Mario more obstinate.

The Maestro was surprised at himself. Though he usually hated all amateur

musicians and found their performances offensive, he now begged this poor youth to sing—yielding, as always, to the strange guiding of circumstances. The sorrowful face of Mario with its resigned beauty touched the Maestro to a cordiality which seemed strange even to himself.

"What do you like best to sing, Mario ?"

"Oh, it's nothing, sir, my singing! Nothing at all!"

"Do you sing songs or opera music ?"

"Oh no, sir ! Only what goes through my head. Only nonsense !"

"Ah, you improvise, as they did in the olden days ?"

"So he does ! Madonna, so he can, Excellency !" cried the theatre servant excitedly, proud of the strange word.

"Hush, father, I tell you, hush ! It is really nothing at all, sir !"

Slower and slower moved the cripple's fingers over the plaque, again and again he raised his eyes to the bearded face that had now lost all consciousness of itself and out of the depths of its kindliness smiled upon the sorrowful scene with compelling charm. Mario suddenly weakened.

"Mother plays," he said helplessly, "and then it comes."

"Mother, Mother," cried the old man, seizing the opportune moment, "take the guitar !"

The moments in which she could accompany her son's singing were, for the wandering-witted mother, moments of unearthly happiness. Though she could no longer control her thoughts, her son's music thought within her, so that, unconsciously, she made no fault. The music revealed the mystic identity of mother and child.

She did not need to be asked again. Misshapen, her half-blind eyes burning, she sat now beside Mario and pressed the instrument against her breast like an infant. She looked at him, but he gave no answering look: she smiled though he had not spoken. Then she nodded happily several times as if she now knew all she needed and a chord rose slowly. Mario had leant his worn face back with closed eyes. Something wordless came to him, he tried to catch the motive first softly then in middle voice.

As soon as the Maestro heard the firm resonant voice he knew that this was a very fine "dark" tenor voice, far removed from the bleating *voce bianca* of the average singer, without being what could be called a powerful voice. He recognized that there had been no conscious cultivation, yet the registers were firmly used. From E upwards it strengthened naturally and the high notes streamed freely from a perfectly uncramped throat. There were none of the conceited intonations of the self-conscious amateur. The tone never allowed itself to be carried away by stress of feeling, firmly controlled and sustained, its fine timbre swept on evenly and strongly.

Here, by a freak of nature, was the mixed voice, that perfect combination of head and chest notes that professors of voice production strive for years to develop in their pupils.

The characteristic gift of the Italian race, a tone free from harshness and full of spontaneous ecstasy, had, in this unschooled voice, attained a triumphant perfection. *Bel canto !* Does any song exist save only that, with its soaring independence of words or meaning or declamation, the noblest, the most soul-filled instrument of the brain of man, the sheer, wordless human voice as it wells out, pure and free ?

Not altogether wordlessly did Mario's song pour through the room. Ever and anon words formed themselves out of the sheer sound. These words had a meaning other than their own. It was the spirit of song seeking in the trammelled speech of the body another wandering spirit that she could never find.

Among them were such words as these:—

The boats draw out to sea
I see them go, the island boats,
When she is near joy comes to me

But vengeance when I am alone.
Ahimé!
The boats draw out to sea,
And vengeance dwells in me.

Or:—

I have loved her over with my kisses.
I have loved her over with my breath.
From all the towers the striking bells
From chest and table the tick of death.
But I shout Joy! and joy, joy, joy!
Ahimé!
The bells of death are striking,
I have loved my Beautiful with my breath.

Thus the higher speech of music flowed out of the genuinely poetic spirit of the singer, unconscious, and far from great in itself. This was the absolute antithesis of the Wagnerian theory, in which the poetic content of the music must go first.

And as he listened to the strange melody of this beautiful voice, a sense of cheerful serenity filled the Maestro's soul. The genius in that crippled body assuredly knew nothing of the laws of form, and that he had not even heard very much opera music was clear from the originality of the improvisation. And yet it was a complete and perfect aria that he sang. The melody was there, broadening into a sadly moving phrase and turning upon itself like a wandering, searching spirit, proving to him that the perfect symmetry of the aria, its unity, its proportion, or whatever one might choose to call it, was not a thing willed or governed by any external cause, but a law of nature—a natural force that had been materialized and brought to light through the genius of Italy.

Music lives in time, and time, in its experimental form, is memory. Music is a state of self-remembering. All desire to oppose, to contradict, to retort, all that tends to controversy, is a murderous attack upon the nature of music, upon its sacred unity—which is Italian. Who, if not Italy, with monody and thorough-bass has actually created the whole of modern music? There have indeed been other schools such as the famous contrapuntists of the Netherlands. Why have they not carried the palm? And the Germans? Have they truly created anything new? Were their classics not after all modelled on the Italian form, on the aria which Frescobaldi, Corelli, Binvaldi, among the instrumentalists, had already established? What have they done, then, these Germans? Only destroyed!

A wave of hatred swept the Maestro, the same sensation that he had felt after the battle of Sedan. It was the hate of the Romans against the barbarians of the Dark Ages. Like a spark struck by this feeling from the depths of his nature, an old war motto of the European world rose in Verdi's mind—"The idealism of this people is one and the same as their destructive fury!" The miracle of a yearning, questioning, immaterial spirit was something he could not understand. It was only a disintegrating, analytic spirit striving against nature, evil, protestant against the eternal verities of Music itself.

With head leant back and closed eyes he sang on, this man who could never raise himself from his seat, to whom only in the free soaring of his song any outpouring of life could come. With inexhaustible ease, melody after melody flowed from him, rising now in glorious strength and falling in sweet cadence. As it swung from song to song, joy waxed stronger and stronger in the dark clearness of his voice. Could such joy come from the chained heart of a cripple? No, it was not his heart, not *he* who sang. He was at this moment only a nest whence, on free wings, Music itself was flying, a window through which untroubled light was pouring.

The witless mother seemed to have fallen into a hypnotic sleep or deep reverie. Her glassy blue eyes smiling unconsciously, she found the true modulation with unfailing precision, and adorned the melody with little grace notes thrown in here and there out of the depths of her own felicity.

Outside the window a crowd had collected, who for Italians stood with unusual quietness. It was always so when Mario sang, though that happened less and less frequently now. The former theatre porter of La Venice, a loud-voiced, irrepressible man, silently drank in his son's song. Only Nina, the patient drudge of the family—poorer than her brother to whom God had shown grace, poorer than her mother was when near to him, poorer than her father who could at least argue at the street corners—only Nina clattered in the next room angrily or indifferently.

Rapture held the old Maestro also. It was a poor, untaught cripple, a glass-worker from Murano, who sang, but Nature, looking on him, had been filled with a great compassion and laid her gift in the balance. Never had the antique oneness of singer and poet appeared so clear to the Maestro as here. That voice had recalled Melody from the past to him. And he received it like a consolation, a compensating gift of the gods for all the controversy awakened by Wagner and his music. All his doubt melted away, all the self-distrust which had assailed him before the pages of Lear with such deadly loathing. Surely, it is only one lost to all feeling who, when the words "I love you" are spoken, begins to study the syntax of the sentence. Perhaps he would be able to work now.

With a last lovely cadence Mario's voice ceased. For a moment he gazed before him and then, as if nothing had intervened, his flying hands took up their work again. The guitar fell from the mother's hand. She was really sleeping now. Outside the window there rose no cry of enthusiasm, but many voices and sounds as in the lassitude of an awakening.

The Maestro broke the silence. He expressed himself, as always, briefly and practically. "All that is necessary shall be done, Dario. Come to me to-morrow at the Albergo. Ask for the gentleman in number two. You understand. Everything will be arranged."

Then he went up to the improvisateur, laying his hand quickly and shamefacedly on his shoulder, and with eyes averted, in a low, unimpressive tone, as as if he spoke of something trivial and commonplace, he said, "Our old and sacred Italian melody has come to life again. That was good—good !"

And he waved aside Dario, who would have followed in his enthusiasm.

Naturally, Verdi from that moment gave all possible thought to Mario's case. But he found it a very difficult matter to handle. In all that pertained to music, the customary aids and means of culture lay ready to his hand, but these seemed unsuited to the strangeness of the circumstances. To try to cultivate Mario's talent might be to destroy it. What had the genius of improvisation to do with the pedantries of print and paper ?

His material wants—this at least was consoling—could be supplied.

What after all could be made of Mario ? A well-trained singer, who could never walk on to a platform. Possibly ! An industrious Conservatorium student steadily blackening the music paper with four-part exercises. Probably ! A despairing suicide who amid the new life and interests could not endure his hopeless infirmity. Assuredly !

Nothing has come down to us of his history. The Maestro lost trace of him before long.

CHAPTER V

GUELPH AND GHIBELLINE

1

THE Senator's heart was sick, for he could not disguise from himself that Verdi, his friend, was taking no notice of him.

Had it not been always so in his life ? All, all, in love and friendship alike,

had failed to return the eager, thirsting love he offered. They had taken it and with disdainful finger-tips or respectful kindness they had put it aside. For long the Senator had felt that life was a see-saw:

"When I go up, you go down; when you go up, I go down."

In the last years of the war, when the waves were riding high and the state was crystallizing, they had wished to make him a minister. He knew well that they held him to be weak and unstable, but at the same time his reputation, his fine appearance, and his ready eloquence had often proved useful. Proud and scrupulous, as are all true revolutionaries, he had still said nothing when he saw the course of events developing in a manner that he could not approve.

When, later, with a fine gesture, he had resigned his Senatorship, the step was scarcely noticed by any one. What did the men of to-day know of him?

Only his friends remained, for his own children were stranger to him than a Papuan or a Maori might have been. And so many leaves had now fallen before the November winds. After the death of his master Mazzini there remained standing only the faithful figure of Verdi. Now even that beloved friend, whose path had lain side by side with the Senator's, whose music lived in his as in no other heart, he, the sacrosanct, to whom, hard as it was, he even forgave his political differences, even Verdi, merely suffered his love without returning it. Had he not then remarked the thoughtful tenderness of his friend's conduct? Not remarked that he never sought him out in company, or pushed himself upon him? Although in his passion for his friend's work he attended every performance of it in Milan or elsewhere, he always returned home immediately, respecting the loneliness of creative men. And so it had happened, again and again, that eager outsiders pushed their way greedily into the company of Verdi, while he, the intimate and devoted friend, went away disconsolate. Oh, those people with whom Verdi went! An unjustified and passionate jealousy of all the Maestro's other friends consumed him. Who was this Count Arrivabene, in whom Verdi so readily confided? An upstart, a journalist! Nothing else! And Senator Piroli? A "worthy man" politically, whom the careless approval of the phrase best described. And Clarina Massei with her famous salon, where she pretended to have entertained Balzac. An artist's and musician's maiden aunt, fussing æsthetically over men of genius in order to borrow notoriety for herself! How he hated the whole crowd. *He* did not run after the Maestro, *he* did not write fulsome weekly letters to him; for years, in spite of many invitations, he had not visited Saint Agatha. Did Verdi not feel the delicacy of this behaviour, was he not grateful for it? Now that, for whatever reason, he had come to Venice, how could he be so cold and constrained, so indifferent to his only, his dearest friend, as to let three, four days pass without spending a single hour with him?

The Senator sat at his writing-table and piled his lexicons high before him. The folios creaked. For twenty years he had worked on a manuscript that grew but slowly—"Comparative Study of the Texts of the Tragedies of Euripides." Another work had been begun, "Conjectures on the Fragments of Menander," and a new selection from the works of Aristotle upon Natural Science.

This hair-splitting little work to which the Senator had given birth was a baroque controversial effort in which there was no human interest. The glowing red of his nature combined strangely with the blue-white of philology. Perhaps he sought by these studies to counteract in himself the self-destructive tendency of the musical temperament.

At this moment he consigned the whole mass of quotations, footnotes and reading-matter heartily to the devil, seized his wide-brimmed soft hat—classic badge of the true Risorgimentist—and hurried out.

On the Campo San Luca, in front of a political café, he found himself in a group of men all wearing the same patriotic headgear, and after ten minutes the mood of stiff-necked irascibility passed, for years of experience of men, of failure and of opposition, had taught him philosophy. "A worn-out railway engine, he said to himself, "all that's wrong with it is that it no longer steams—I suppose

that's what I am coming to." And with this reflection he turned homewards again.

By the ferry next to the Grimani palace he saw his son Italo taking leave of two women, one young and very slim, the other older. "Might be an Englishwoman," thought the Senator, "but for her Italian gestures !"

Italo was a little confused when he came up.

"With my well-known tendency to be indiscreet, my son, may I ask you who the lovely being was whom you have just left ?"

"It was Margherita Dezorzi, papa ! You have heard of her ?"

"Alas ! I am not yet old enough to be acquainted with the whole register of beauty."

"Margherita is the leading singer in the opera company at the Rossini Theatre. It's a very second-rate company, but she is the greatest artist in Italy, perhaps in Europe, to-day. And she is hardly twenty-three yet !"

"Is her voice so wonderful ?"

"It is a beautiful voice. But nowadays, papa, we don't consider the voice so much."

"So ? I suppose all the singers consider nowadays is raking in the gold ?"

"When you hear her you will not scoff. She is so sensitive, so soulful, so modern. . . . And nothing of the actress about her at all. The purest, most unapproachable creature that lives. She is never to be seen without her mother."

"Eh, that's inconvenient. Still I seem to remember to have heard somewhere that in the theatre one can gain knowledge not only of costume and its wearers but also of mothers."

"You are getting sarcastic again, papa. She is a noble being."

"The devil ! A being ! Nowadays one declines 'woman' in the neuter gender. That is modern ! And a charming outlook ! Mankind won't last much longer. Your precious new century has no use for men and women. An exquisite community of sex. I congratulate the children. Lucky Europe !"

The Senator winked at his son and took his seat in the ferry-boat that crossed the canal. He hastened home and the young footman met him at the door.

"The Signor Maestro has been here. He came just after you had gone out. Here is his card."

The Senator read the lines written in the wild, irregular hand that he loved so well.

"Forgive me ! I have had so much to attend to in these three days. Now I want to see you. Come to dinner. Come at once. Now!"

Without a word to the servant, the Senator turned and hurried away to his friend, for he would not lose a moment. No trace of heart-sickness now marred his pleasure. This was his strength and his weakness through which the hot anger of so many disillusions had been dispelled: he could forget.

How little share the Maestro had in this fortunate heritage!

2

Verdi disliked restaurants. For thirty years now his fame in his Fatherland had been such that he could show himself nowhere without being recognized. All lies were hateful to him. And lying he considered it to sit there in assumed unnatural ease with the irritating sting of many eyes on his back. He hated all bodily contacts, and to be stared at curiously was bodily contact.

Once in the great square of Parma he had been tortured by a crowd. Several people had begun to cry "Viva !" and he fled horrified into a house where he had to stay hidden for an hour in the attic till it was safe to come down again unnoticed.

And to-day, as he waited for the Senator, he took cover, as usual, in his room. He would not be waited on by the hotel waiters, but had brought his own servant. This servant was a smart young fellow called Beppo, not the celebrated Luigi who left the box-seat of a Reggian cab to follow his beloved

master of music. After the Senator, Luigi was the most notable of Verdi-philes. Called as from the darkness of midnight, from the sleep of death itself, to serve his Maestro, he could sing every *cantilene* of his idol in true tune, not the popular melodies only, such as "*Quando la sera placida*," "*Eri tu, che macchiavi*," "*Ai nostri monti ritorneremo*," but also many of the recitatives from Due Foscari, Giovanna d'Arco, and Macbeth.

In the two days during which the impression made by Mario's song was fading, the Maestro had again taken up with unabated energy the campaign upon Lear. A completed composition now lay before him, but he could not look on it without being terrified by the confused and contradictory emotions that his own music now awakened in him.

The short-lived comfort which the cripple's song brought to him, that sudden belief in the old, undying Italian melody, had fled once more. On the other hand, the red-bound piano-music locked away in the cabinet irritated his nerves incessantly. He had already thought of throwing, if not the devil's gift itself, then the key that kept it prisoner, into the winter darkness of the lagoon.

Besides this, the voice that had said to him, so clearly and unmistakably, before the Vendramin palace, "Call upon the German," would not be silenced. And as it rose, so his pride also rose to combat it. A story that he had read somewhere lately recurred to him, how Rossini, during his sojourn in Vienna, had paid a ceremonious visit to Beethoven, and the German composer, from indifference or intentional rudeness, had ignored it. Identifying Wagner with Beethoven, Verdi now identified himself with Rossini, who resembled him so little and had never even been friendly with him. How he hated Beethoven for his prepotency, his discourtesy and arrogance ! Verdi felt his nation and his honour insulted by this uncalled-for slight. Was not that long-forgotten incident a forecast of the present ? How, then, could he think of visiting Wagner ? However lightly the young and easygoing Rossini might have taken such an insult, *he* would never suffer it.

Thus the situation approached its crisis. As in a sickness Verdi felt for the first time in his life that the desire for death and the forces of life were at war within him, and that on neither side was he in supreme command.

The Senator arrived and embraced Verdi. A slight unaccountable annoyance assailed the Maestro and he immediately thought, "This annoyance is prophetic of what our daily intercourse will become." After the meal, when they had both lighted Havanas, this time from Verdi's store, and the blue incense of the smoke was filling the air, the Senator entered upon one of the subjects that lay nearest his heart.

"Verdi, you know, don't you, how it is with me ?"

"Eh ?"

"I am passé. My life is over."

"That's the way of the world. Early goes the sun to rest, or as Shakespeare says, 'The rain, it raineth every day.' "

"It makes no difference to me; you know that. I have summed up life for myself. But it is strange. Don't be annoyed with me; I may be taking an unwelcome liberty, but I have always counted upon you. In my thoughts you are my vindicator."

"You are a classical scholar, my good friend, but my schoolmaster, Seletti, you must remember, hardly got me as far as the regular verbs. Have a little pity on my dullness of comprehension and explain yourself."

"Friend! All is not as I could wish with you, either." The Maestro threw a restraining look at the Senator. He did not like the idea of anybody discussing his psychology with him. But he was mistaken, nothing was farther from his friend's mind.

"Verdi ! I feel that it is no longer as it used to be, that you no longer have a few open and ignorant enemies, but many secret and malicious ones. There is something intangible in the air against you—something very dangerous though it is unspoken."

"Ah, you have noticed that, too? The thing has been worrying me for ten years. It had already begun with Aïda and earlier. For years at the rehearsals in the Scala I have had not even a glass of water brought to me. But it is not enmity so much as contempt."

"What! You yourself, here in Italy, have met with this impudence! Oh, the thankless dogs! That the young should fall away is natural, perhaps. But for the Syndicate and Council of Bologna to offer this fellow Wagner the freedom of the city, that's monstrous, Giuseppe, monstrous!"

The Maestro laughed a little harshly.

"And what if they are in the right?"

"In the right! In the right! Verdi! The hour is here! The great hour of your life! You must show them who you are, you must thunder down on this new spirit and throw it in the dust. I have given in to them myself, but, though we are of the same years, you are really much younger than I, and you have the strength, the power, to produce twenty new works. You must do something new, something unexpected that will shame them, lame them, overpower them! You must bring back the old days again. That is your duty, your tremendous duty!"

The Senator's plump cheeks were trembling. Verdi remained unmoved as he answered:

"To begin with, my dear friend, no artist can do good work if he sets out to shame and lame and overpower his audience. Any trace of self-conceit, any turning of the eyes aside, works like a worm of corruption in the body of his work. And secondly—this much Latin I know—*tempora mutantur* and unfortunately not always *nos mutamur in illis*. Very probably this universal feeling against me is well founded. We have both, my friend, been standing still without realizing it. It is vain for us to oppose the natural law, the practical necessity, that a worn-out tool must be thrown aside."

"Never, not for a moment, do you believe that, Verdi. You are no artist if you do, no fighter, but a poor coward. No, no! Don't hold back! You must write! You know that yourself, better than anyone."

"Shall I write to give them proof, to let them see that I am not what I once was—or perhaps never was? There are attempts at correction in life that are worse than mistakes."

"Is it the author of Rigoletto who says that?"

"Do you still believe that art or fame will last? Surely the Marchese Gritti's collection might teach you better! Each of us has his day. Mark you, only *one* day, whether it come sooner or later."

"No, you have many days before you still, Verdi! Make something new!"

The Maestro was silent for a time, then in a quiet tone he said:

"And what if I have written a new opera?"

The Senator sprang up and began to rush about the room.

"He is writing! I knew it, I knew that the hour had struck. He is writing!"

"I will not say that, definitely. For one thing it becomes harder for me, as the years go on, to believe that one can create a new thing out of paper, as if it were so many scores to be copied out."

"You are writing! Oh, I am happy, Verdi, happy! Now you will show all these barbarians, these imbeciles, who you are! Tell me! The rack won't wring it out of me! Is it the Maria Delorme, that you once told me about? But don't tell me anything if you would rather not."

Verdi suddenly stood up:

"Listen. I will play you two pieces from the opera. I want very much to know how they will strike you. But don't, please, give an opinion till after the second piece."

The Maestro opened the portfolio of Lear music and selected two finished numbers. The first was the monologue of the villain Edmund from the first act—it was composed with finesse and bore all the marks of modern music,

a piece which had given him many troubled days, and was, he believed, successfully harmonized. The second was the duet between Lear and Cordelia, a number which he hated because it sounded to him like a rehash of Rigoletto stuff.

He laid the music on the piano.

Then he sat down and began to recite and accompany the monologue with that dramatic use of voice and action which his music demanded of all singers. The Senator, exhausted by his outburst, did not realize when the aria began in this unfamiliar music. It seemed to him that Verdi was letting his thoughts wander, and, too tired to play the melody, was improvising instead, modulating in strange dissonant chords and ear-wounding intervals.

When the piece was finished, the Maestro did not look at his visitor, but began the second extract.

Immediately, in a nameless well-being, the Senator rose from his seat, his blood dancing happily to the rhythm as it had done ever since Nabucco first charmed him, his body light and his breath ecstatic as a taut muscle.

Melody after melody was poured out in the light, sweet voice of the Maestro. Adorably the notes coiled and wound themselves in sinuous meandering, and finally began to flow strongly till one of Verdi's most impetuous *presto finales* carried the enthusiasm of his friend before it like a mountain torrent.

"Verdi, Verdi for ever !" shouted the Senator, losing all self-control. "The greatest thing you have ever done ! King ! Conqueror !"

The Maestro quietly closed the piano.

"And how did you like the first piece ?"

In the depths of his mind the Senator felt that a trap had been laid for him, and he tried for a moment to avoid it. But he was too honest.

"The first piece ? Oh, everything that you do is great. But perhaps I didn't understand it. It is difficult, it is not Italian, forgive me ! But the duet, my Verdi, the dûet is a gift of God."

The Maestro stood up stiff and strange. His hair and beard, his blue eyes even, had turned black, all his features locked. It was easy to see that this man's back was at the wall; he was holding the bridge against the world. Harshly, as if mortally offended, he said:

"The first piece—the monologue—is good, even supremely good. The duet is foolishness, a stupidity, a sop to the public of the past. Now I know at least that you understand no better than the public has understood for the last thirty years. And *you* tell me to write a new work! When I do it, will you follow me in the least ? Have I not enemies enough behind me that you must stand, also, an enemy in front of me ?"

This bitter, crazy outburst came from the mouth of the Maestro in spite of himself. Shaken by sudden anger, he did not know what he did or what he said. The Senator gazed at him dumbfounded for some minutes. Then his chin began to quiver, his throat swelled with suppressed emotion. He felt blindly behind him for his hat. Breathing heavily and with difficulty, he looked long and steadily at the Maestro.

"Rather than be thought an enemy, Verdi, I will go."

His choked breathing would not allow him to say another word, and, forgetting to take his overcoat, he went out.

The Maestro watched him go, still standing stock-still. Deep shame and deeper sorrow swelled in his breast to bursting point.

What devil had done this ? The truest, most selfless of men, to be senselessly wounded because he did not show enthusiasm for a miserable piece of music with which he himself was not in the least pleased. What madness ! What had caused it ? Now he had lost this true soul. His teeth gnashed together, and he could have screamed aloud for agony.

Long he stood staring like a man transfixed by pain. Then he began to pace the room frantically. As he came near and passed it, he struck with his clenched fist the box in which the Tristan music waited.

3

"But are you not aware that it is a piece of luck for an artist to be hated by the press?"—*From a letter of Verdi, quoted by C. Bragagnolo.*

The same evening the contrite Maestro went to the Senator and assured him that he did not know why he had spoken these angry, wounding words, which were no less horrifying to himself than to the insulted man. The Senator had not been indignant so much as shocked. Far more deeply than from the outburst of unfriendly feeling he had suffered from the knowledge that grew upon him—"Verdi is ill. His mind, his genius is in danger. Some deadly infection is in his blood. In that state anything may happen to him. I must try to help him. But how? How? It will require infinite precaution. I brought about the catastrophe by my own clumsiness; my stupid remark was the friction that produced the dangerous spark. Who would have believed that such a calamity could overtake a mind so profound, so calm and self-possessed as his? A character like mine, now—my tempter is always flaring up. But he! Always cool, reflective, full of good judgment and good feeling—and now to break up like that. Verdi breaking up! It cannot be. It is a mania, some terrible, deadly disease that makes him reject that marvellous inspired duet. In that rejection he denies and nullifies his own nature, he is no longer himself. Something must certainly be done to help him. Like a child he needs a mother to soothe his shattered nerves and put him at one with himself. It needs prudence."

As Verdi sat before him penitent, the Senator seemed a different being. The bitterness which tinged his manner when he looked back to the great days and carped at the present was gone. He had an indulgent smile for the Maestro's excuses: there was no need, no need at all, to trouble himself over an outburst of temper. Nobody had suffered more in that way than himself; it was, as they both knew, the cause of all his misfortunes. Besides, he himself was artist enough to know how infuriating idiotic criticism like his remarks about the monologue could be. That music certainly didn't get home to one all at once: it followed one down the street and round the corner and into the dark like a bandit. He called it characteristic, that they shouldn't be able to shake off this wretched Edmund business!

Sadly, Verdi tried to meet his friend's painstaking kindness with a show of warmth. The Senator became more and more expansive. He led the conversation away from the disturbing subject to the quiet realities of everyday life that bring relief from the phantom struggles of the imagination. He knew how to intersperse his gossip with the comic quotation, the full-flavoured anecdote that dissolves constraint, and at the end of an hour Verdi left in a cheerful humour with the old good-fellowship completely restored. At the door the Senator called after him:

"I don't believe the worthy patriarch of Saint Agatha gets enough sleep. Take a day in bed to-morrow, and I will do the same."

The Maestro took the steamboat back to San Zaccaria. It was strange how few people recognized him. What was impossible in Milan, Genoa or Parma he could do here—sit quietly at the side of the vessel while neither the women with their bundles, nor the two men arguing opposite, took any notice of him. It soothed his nerves and brought him a deep content. Altogether unnoticed, however, he knew he was not. For some days he had remarked that his path crossed that of a tall man who followed him with halting footsteps, passed him and looked at him fixedly, disappearing and reappearing. This figure now drifted in its uncertain way across the dark deck of the little steamer, and stowed away somewhere a basket full of bottles, over which a quarrel arose, and the voice of the culprit was heard in bold protest. Finally the man crossed abruptly to Verdi's place, as if he meant to address him. He stopped close in front of the

Maestro, gesticulating with his arms and bending his long body, then sat down on a seat near right under the mast from which hung an oil lamp. In the light of this lantern the Maestro saw one of the most repulsive faces he had ever met in a living creature. Only the eyes had the dignity of a higher being, and this was contradicted by the expression of self-disgust on the half-opened mouth, a horrible blackness in which hung a single huge tooth that, like some uncanny creature, seemed to hold the eye by a kind of horrid fascination.

The Maestro could not decide whether the man was following him with some intention, or whether he was half-witted, for he twisted about in his seat with shifting eyes, made challenging motion with his head, muttered, sighed and smiled to himself, every limb and look full of an unnatural, consuming restlessness. But when the Maestro caught and held the wild, staring gaze, the other shut his eyes and shrank as if from a blow. As if he knew exactly where the Maestro's way lay, he kept close by him at the landing station, pressing towards his victim as they left the boat, so that the Maestro had to draw his clothes aside and twist his body to avoid touching the hateful creature. Only at the door of the hotel did the pursuit cease. He felt an incontrollable impulse to look back at the figure that had followed him. There stood the man, his legs stretched wide apart, holding something invisible with out-stretched arms in the air.

Verdi saw the picture and for a moment with extraordinary clearness the strangeness of his own proceedings rose before his mind. Why was he here leading a chaotic, self-contradictory life? Why had he not listened to his wife and remained in Genoa?

In the threshold he was met by his servant, who was preparing the room for the night. He had just lit a fire that was now whispering its secrets to the listening room.

"Signor Maestro, a man has been here and left this."

Verdi took the paper in his hand—some kind of pamphlet or magazine.

"What sort of man? Who knows that I am here?"

"He did not give his name, but only said, 'Give this to your master.' "

When Beppo had gone the Maestro read the title:—

THE MUSICAL ALCHEMIST.

A Journal exposing the Corruption of the Lyrical Theatre of the Nation, the music publishers and the Italian press critics—given in the name and to the honour of true art by MAESTRO V. SASSAROLI.

And beneath, in very small type, the motto:—

Gold in the pan you'll find at last
If boldly you, with essence true,
Drive lies to hell and hold the real thing fast.

The whole was printed on the unappetizing grey paper, and in the wretched type, that have characterized the anonymous lampoon from time immemorial.

"Sassaroli?" thought the Maestro, only half attending. "Sounds more like the work of a fool than a knave." He threw the sheet down, and from it, as from the bottle in the eastern fable, an evil spirit rose.

There were, to be exact, two evil spirits. One, a grotesque self-conceit; the other, a not less grotesque hatred of himself, Verdi!

The self-conceit was expressed in a mass of notices, full of silly flattery, extracts from letters of ancient date, and the fact that in the high-flown introduction and elsewhere the name of the author was always printed in large, thick letters. Among others one might read such things as:—

"In the year 1840, when our Maestro and author was a much beloved pupil of the famous Saverio Mercadante, this celebrated man wrote to him the following letter in glowing commendation of his composition." Then followed a very cool letter, in which the only words of praise were such as these: "When

you are producing anything, spare no pains to perfect it." To this commendation was added a long effusion by the commended one: "As we know, Mercadante was a very severe critic. His praise was never bestowed on the unworthy. He prophesied for our Maestro, who never sought honour or applause, a great career. But the opinion of the great man was not the opinion of the deluded public. Misled by bought journalists, grasping publishers, and the intoxication of trivial music, they preferred a certain Verdi while MAESTRO SASSAROLI was left in the shade. But, too proud to breathe the same air as such self-seeking, besmirched souls, it is his fixed intention to remain in the shade until the sun of more enlightened times shall expose that gang whose place, with thieves and time-servers, is in the darkness."

In another place appeared the following notice, a patchwork in a variety of journalistic styles:—

"One of the local readers of the 'Alchemist' informs us that on a recent Sunday the municipal band of Orvieto performed the overture of the Opera, 'Richard, Duke of York,' by MAESTRO V. SASSAROLI, to an enthusiastic audience in the crowded square.

"This circumstance is particularly noteworthy because the Editor cannot understand by what means the conductor of this most excellent orchestra, who is one of his best friends, procured this music. A sign of the times! As our readers know, this work, the composer of which is the first and only Italian Maestro to write the verses for his own music, met with a tremendous reception in the Doria theatre in Genoa, but in spite of the furious protests of the public the management would not venture to repeat this success. Why? Because G. Verdi, who lives in Genoa, alarmed for his fame as the master-composer, had immediately mustered his mercenaries, who live by him and by whom he lives. Hatred was let loose. The hounds of criticism, whose troughs are filled by the house of Ricordi, were let loose upon their defenceless prey. Director, singers, musicians, even the theatre staff went in fear of their lives. After the first glorious performance the opera was killed. And hence it is that to this day this unique work, in which the reforms of Richard Wagner were originally and independently anticipated, remains unprinted and unproduced.

"All honour to the orchestra conductor of Orvieto for his proud deed!

"MAESTRO SASSAROLI has nevertheless bound himself, in full consciousness of the national consequences, never and nowhere in his lifetime to perform this opera. The rights of its reproduction after his death are testamentarily secured."

Verdi looked through this mad tirade without any trace of anger or excitement, but only grief that man could fall so far. It was a peculiar grief to him, because his own innocent existence had caused this man, who perhaps understood and could write music well, to fall into this paroxysm of hate and delusion.

Another thing struck him strangely: he was always referred to in this libel as "Herr" Verdi. The polemical trick was ludicrously clear. Wherever and whenever the title "Herr" occurred it indicated the deepest contempt. Then his eye fell on an article headed:—

"True Opinion of the Press, as uncorrupted by
Ricordi, upon Herr Verdi."

The man must have been a voracious reader of the newspapers. From the smallest alehouse sheet, from all the great dailies, from reviews and foreign journals, every disparaging word that had appeared about the Maestro was collected and assembled here. One arrogant Southern inkslinger declared that he had, in his latest work, adulterated Italian with German music, another reflected upon the mangled melodies in the recently produced Boccanegra, while a third rebuked him for the far-fetched harmonies and modern tendencies of the same work.

His practised eye read through all these hoary criticisms, but his brain did not take in any real impression from them. They had all long been driven home to him by the lash of his own spirit. But he read one of the extracts, bearing the title of a great North German journal, carefully, perhaps because the sympathetic collector had marked it line by line with red:—

"E. Hanslik was right when he said that Verdi's is a vulgar nature. There is nothing in the recent history of the theatre so unmerited as the success of this man.

"His subjects are scraps of amateurish Babylonian trash (Trovatore), scraps of tasteless sex-sentimentality (Traviata), and scraps of coarse huckstering (Rigoletto). And even these are the best. When one thinks of Hernani or The Power of Destiny a cloud comes before one's eyes. This monstrosity has hardly been matched in music. The melodies are barrenly symmetrical and tedious in the extreme, their repetitions boring the listener to sleep. A cynically exaggerated *brio*, and a raw technique that constantly obtrudes itself, add to the torture. The horrible unisons of the chorus with their polonaise rhythm have the single and simple effect of irritating the nerves of the listener. On the harmony one need not waste a word, there is none to discuss. The theme is as meagre as a piston solo. The instrumentation bleats and chirps its promptly coinciding common chords with an insufferable monotony.

"Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti are still the great names, to whom, as to the actual aristocracy, belongs the prerogative of banality. Verdi has shaken hands with the plebeians of the earth. He is a whitewasher of hovels. And the German public throws the works of Weber, Marschner, Spohr, and the new music of Richard Wagner under the table, while it pants eagerly after the whole repertory of this Verdi opera.

"There was a time when the people of Germany occasionally fell in the dust, and that was not altogether inexcusable, but to-day they wallow there incessantly."

While he was reading this the Maestro had felt as if a heavy stone were lying on his chest. Now it seemed as if the great block pressed on his brain and his thoughts struggled fruitlessly to find expression.

"What does it mean? I have had no evil intentions. My life is almost a blank—nothing but notes, notes, notes, every hour of the day and night. A few gracious hours at most, and they came seldom—the rest was toil. After fifty years at the galleys must I submit to this? Have I no honour? Dare I have none? The law protects the officer, the merchant, the artisan, the peasant, the labourer. Who dares insult them? Only I am unprotected, a helpless mark for malice." Deeply stirred, he started to his feet and the hateful sheet fell on the floor. "The Italian throws 'German' at me, the German consigns my work to the Italian dogs. Where then do I belong? Where is my place?"

A phrase came into his mind that he had once seen quoted in a book: "To the Ghibelline was I a Guelf and to the Guelf a Ghibelline."

This sentence woke in him a bitter sense of loneliness and despair. Tears stood in his eyes as he lifted the sordid pamphlet from the floor.

He looked at the cover.

"This copy is numbered two hundred. Two hundred readers, two hundred Sassarolis, two hundred hate-distorted faces, two hundred rivals! And I? I too am the rival of another. What is it that men want of one another? What is this wrong, this senseless wrong, that they do themselves? It is not in nature. Our soul has wandered into a false path, a dreadful path. Our poor Ego, how we mishandle it, how we let others mishandle it! A fatal path!"

Just then the Maestro recollected that he ought not to smoke any longer on account of his throat, and he puffed the smoke from his mouth angrily, disgusted even with the tobacco he loved too well.

"There it is again! Our joys are as poisonous as our sorrows. Poison, poison! We have lost the palate for true enjoyment. And, oh God! it is too late to begin anew."

"Sassaroli. . . ?"

Verdi laid the dirty yellow pamphlet before him on the table, so that he could not help seeing it.

"Sassaroli—that must be this Sassa. . . ."

He saw it all now.

Although it had grown late the Maestro got out his work. He laid the Lear music open before him. With steady, strenuous effort, spurred on by no hope, no self-seeking, with all thought of gain and of fame long faded—with only duty, the last fruitless tie, to bind him, he turned to his work again.

4

"The word drops, spent and annulled."—*From a letter quoted by C. Bragagnola.*

It is not very easy to-day—forty years after the occurrence—to give an explanation of the life and work of this man who shadowed Maestro Verdi so unpleasantly on his arrival in Venice and pointed that revolver, "The Musical Alchemist," at his head. If it were merely a fool, such as Gritti, that had to be resurrected from the annals of Italian opera production in the nineteenth century—a fool endowed by magic with creative power—Vincenzo Sassaroli, the long-legged man with the almost toothless mouth, would have figured in these annals as the composer of an opera that was once performed and failed. But when one knows that this musician also composed a comic opera, Santa Luca,. and further, a Tantum Ergo and a once-performed Mass for choir and full orchestra—that he was a pianist, an organist, a teacher of counterpoint, a journalist and a pamphleteer—one can hardly attribute so much even to the wisest of fools.

In a book now long out of print, however, Vincenzo Sassaroli has been recalled from the underworld. Not, indeed, as victor over Verdi, which justifiably or unjustifiably he claimed to be, but rather as a tragic moth fluttering in his clearer light. This book, which presents to us "the nephew and dear pupil of the celebrated Mercadante," is Arthur Pougin's "Life and Work of G. Verdi."

Where the few numbers of "The Musical Alchemist," or the warlike brochure, "Observations on the present state of Italian Musical Art, with particular reference to the artistic significance of Verdi's Aïda and Mass," may lie mouldering to-day, no man knows.

Pougin has only preserved the two letters of Vincenzo Sassaroli that reveal the tragic climax of his life. The first of these letters, addressed to Tito Ricordi, in tones of Gracchic virtue demands of the publisher that he should, after consultation with Verdi, give him, Sassaroli, an opportunity of setting the libretto of Aïda to music himself. After he had read and heard the Egyptian oblation of the world-renowned Maestro, he said, he resolved to challenge him to the following form of duel. He proposed that six Maestri, three to be chosen by Verdi and three by himself, with a seventh at their head chosen by the other six, should form a panel to judge the rival work. If the comparison should result in his favour, Ricordi should then purchase the new Aïda for twenty thousand francs, this sum to be deposited, in the meantime, in the hands of a third person. Should the verdict be given against him, the money should be returned to the depositor except for a deduction sufficient to provide him with daily bread while he was debarred by his work on the opera from earning a livelihood by other means.

"As you see," added this letter, "I am here throwing out a challenge to Verdi and to you, his publisher, and I await your answer. The only danger that you run in accepting this challenge is the loss of the deduction mentioned above, for which I can, if necessary, give security. And I, for my part, will have the satisfaction of seeing whether you dare to embrace this opportunity of crushing men and reducing me to silence by failure, and proving that all your

press telegrams from Cairo, Paris and Naples, hailing Verdi as invincible, were spontaneous and not fabricated by you."

The publisher printed this unique letter in the humorous column of his musical Gazette, with an ironic running commentary upon it. Is that the way to treat a desperate duellist? A second letter was immediately inscribed and expressed to the head office of the great firm:—

GENOA,
February, 1876.

"DEAR SIR,

"I find my letter of the third inst. printed in the humorous section of your Gazette. In this letter I offered you and Herr Verdi a challenge. This challenge had for object to show to the world of art that his opera 'Aïda' could be re-written and incomparably improved.

"This challenge was made because I saw that a corrupt Press was proclaiming 'Aïda' to be not only the masterpiece of Verdi, but as an incommensurable forward step in the world of art.

"How could I, who practise the art of music to-day as always with passionate devotion, who with all my powers have defended art from injury, quietly see a work which appears to me mediocre, even when viewed indulgently, being received with admiration by artists and connoisseurs?

"You have received my challenge with a display of very poor wit, and you have so published my most serious letter as to provoke the laughter of your public against me.

"Sir, when I choose to jest I shall do so on a different strain from yours and Herr Verdi's. But I have little mind for jest when the matter in hand is the throwing down of a challenge to the corruption of art. The manner in which you have received my challenge only serves to make it clear to me how far my charge succeeded in striking home.

"Would you know the truth? *You are afraid.*

"*Afraid*, because this is not a question of the opinion of a public already worked upon.

Afraid, because no paid press could put their version of the facts stated by me before the arbitrators.

Afraid, because it is the opinion of Master-artists that is in question, men whom neither long trumpeting, nor double scenes, nor negro-boys, nor chariots of war, nor shouts of triumph, nor Khedive, nor Cairo correspondents, nor Pharaoh's sceptre can deceive.

"*Afraid*, because the chosen Maestri might, perhaps, in their wisdom, following the unperverted truth, arrive at the true decision.

"*Afraid*, finally, because an artist has challenged the work of one who has been rendered famous in the eyes of the world only by untiring advertisement and by press and publishing intrigue.

"All these fears are redoubled by this fact, that this is not the first time that Herr Verdi's music has had to stand comparison with mine. And woe to you, if the author of 'Aïda' comes off no better than he has already done.

"For truly, he is not the only man who can put two notes together, as we might learn any day if ability were duly honoured.

"If Herr Verdi has, indeed, as they say, completed the fusion of the German and Italian schools (in which there is much matter for dispute), I must point out that he is by no means the first who has succeeded in doing so. In the year 1845, when Verdi was still struggling feebly with cabaletta (does he do more to-day?), an unprejudiced critic bestowed the same praise upon myself. The fact is, this work of mine which had been accepted by the well-known house of Ricordi, was withdrawn by me, and the right of its production is still withheld.

"Is all this humorous, Herr Tito Ricordi? If it is not, be very careful how you apply that word to things that may have more serious consequences than you think.

"Dust enough has been thrown in the eyes of the ignorant. Your infallible Verdi and you, his all-powerful publisher, are challenged by a man, who compared with you is weak. You have answered me with laughter, and this answer shows me unmistakably that you are afraid."

Then Sassaroli went on to speak of the twenty thousand francs that were to be deposited. This was no great sum, he averred, for the house of Ricordi that had paid so much higher a price for works that were already dead. With the bitterness of retrospective mania he added:—

"I have named this sum because four years ago, in October, 1871, through the famous Maestro Mazzucato, I wrote for you an *opera semiseria* gratis and solely on the condition that you should assist me in getting the work performed. . . . You gave me the heartiest of refusals ! . . . Hence I cannot offer to do fresh work for you gratis, since I have cause to fear that you would refuse recognition to that also. And now a last word. You may, with your well-known impartiality, print this second letter of mine. If you would not have the brand of cowardice openly stamped upon you, do not let it appear in the humorous column."

When, in spite of this injunction, the second letter was also published with a facetious commentary, no one was better pleased than Vincenzo Sassaroli. With this publication his great hour had struck. If all his other work had failed, this letter had succeeded, and not as a jest merely. It must be remembered that in the last ten years of the nineteenth century Italy was swarming with Maestri. One of the fruits of the heterarchy was that every town, every borough, every village produced its musical composer.

In the earliest times the musical composers of every district had been expected to supply their native place with operas and masses. Though this system, which continued into the middle ages, had gradually fallen into abeyance, there had evolved out of it a race of distrustful, obscurantist and mutually antagonistic pariahs of music. Even in the good days of Rossini this type of composer still lived and flourished, for the "Swan of Pesaro" as he was called, the householder of Bologna, the gourmand and speculator on the Bourse of Paris, was the victim of an invincible laziness. From his fourteenth year the spirit of sloth had conquered him, and his poorer brethren in Apollo found that the sun of his renown not only fell harmlessly upon them, but if they allowed themselves to bask nakedly in its rays, was even helpful to them.

What a pleasant comrade was this surliest of epicures, this jolliest of slander-mongers, this world-subduing Gioacchino Rossini ! How different from that clodhopper, the Maestrino of Busseto, in whose steely eyes no one had ever seen a smile, so satanic was his ambition !

Sprung from their own guild, even from below their own level, how he had startled them with his first opera ! And how they hated him, this earnest unlatin-like, gloomy toiler ! His spirit was foreign to them, he belonged elsewhere and had no community with them, he was vulgar, chaotic, self-willed, and uneducated. And yet they could not but admit, accepting the inevitable, that Verdi was eclipsing the sun of the godlike Rossini.

By the end of twenty years the best of them was outclassed, at the end of thirty they were all laid low, and at the end of forty the man from Busseto reigned supreme over a hemisphere. Everywhere the crowds were lamenting, in happy sadism, the sweet sorrows of Trovatore. Meyerbeer and the older opera was fading, and only the youngest had yet begun to reel in the Wagnerian ecstacy.

For ten years the thousand Maestri had been sitting bemused in their coffee shops and alehouses. They could not get at this man by any means, he never gave himself away, there were no equivocal stories, no piquant scandal surrounding him, except that he had laboured with the stark, male energy of a Cavour for the revolution to which he set his fiery rhythms. And then he had charmed the public through and through. The people were with him.

Enmity could not breathe in that void; what weapon could be used against this cold demon, who was neither friend nor foe to any man, who never showed himself anywhere or took anyone into his confidence ? At the best there was only silence.

Then came the ten years in which Verdi, too, had remained silent, and was even betrayed into the weakness of allowing his immature early work to be performed. The ban that had paralysed the frustrated rabble of musicians began to lift a little.

The old man was nearly played out !

At once the suppressed vindictive hate against the Maestro rose again, and though no one dared to make an actual attack upon him, there was a universal reassembling of the jackals against the failing lion.

This was the psychological moment in which Sassaroli launched his letter to Ricordi who, as the Maestro's vice-regent, monopoly-holder and agent, was no less hated than he.

Sassaroli had done what none had ventured before—had laid an insane charge of gigantic corruption, misrepresentation and incompetence against Verdi, and challenged him to defend himself. Bizarre as the affair was, ludicrous as the author of the "Duke of York" was known to be, he was immediately hailed by his eager would-be allies as a great man. In the coffee-houses where Sassaroli's grievances had been treated with more or less impatient indulgence, he suddenly became a champion of Justice. His footing was re-established, and he was even honoured, in their ironical and arrogant way, by the more youthful rebels against Verdi's position and technique. The long figure of the aged man, already marked by the cowering stoop of the outcast, seemed to swell as he presided over the nightly councils of the malcontents, and his voice never wearied of improvising on the theme of Verdi's corruption, lack of talent, deceitfulness, and general delinquency. The night-birds of the coffee-houses filled their empty lives with the stream of violent words, that swept away at once the altar of the public idol and the sense of their own inanity. In the grey of morning the new man would see his new friends one after another to their homes. He would on no account allow himself to be convoyed by them, for he could not tolerate the thought that the company, after he had been left alone, should exchange opinions or comments upon him in the attentive darkness. In the last man must the last objection, the last attempt at reconsideration, be silenced by sleep. Only when the last door had closed behind them could he, relieved from anxiety, think of his own rest. But such a success as Sassaroli's, resting upon the insubstantial foundations of malicious pamphleteering, needs constant renewal. His fame only lived through two issues of the "Musical Gazette," and before the third appeared his downfall had begun. Ricordi published no more virtue-swollen letters from the dearest of the pupils of Mercadante. Sassaroli's sun was setting.

The gesture of these slayers of the dragons of fame, corruption, and the press, was too plainly one of diseased egoism to impress more than a few men of the lowest type. Sassaroli's wrongs had never been a practicable weapon of war, and in two months they were forgotten, along with the other Maestri and their following.

The publicity that the amusement of the assailed publisher had first accorded him soon failed. In order to keep the ground from slipping from under his feet, Sassaroli wrote a pamphlet against Verdi and even found a publisher for it, who hoped to profit by a sensation. The booklet closed with the classic quotation:

"I have come into the arena and I wait."

Of this misguided spurt of stupid jealousy only thirty-eight out of the thousand copies were sold. Mortification threw Sassaroli into a fever from which he rose three weeks later with his mind half deranged.

His appearance was terribly altered: hair and teeth had fallen; in the bitterness of his heart his mouth was twisted evilly, as if with the self-loathing engendered by an internal disease. On the street he held a shrill conversation with himself, limping on his strangely long legs, and shaking his fist at the sky; his features worked continually, and he often failed to find the way to his own dwelling. No one wished to speak with him now, his earlier associates moved out of his neighbourhood, his pupils gave up their lessons becaues the man had become horrible to them. He fell, in every sense, into misery.

Only in his eyes, the last vestige of spiritual greatness that remained to him, lived a wavering, imprisoned life.

Among all death-doomed men, the most devil-ridden are the querulous. Their blind, drawn foreheads and sunken cheeks betoken that possession by the devil which the exorcists of the middle ages knew so well.

By hatred and sickness Sassaroli's nature had been demolished like a condemned house. But since hate is a negation and powerless in itself, it must always attach itself to something, and so, when Vincenzo Sassaroli recovered from his illness, his soul, not wholly deserted, identified itself with that of the object of his passion of hatred—with the person of Verdi.

In Genoa he began to watch the Maestro, patrolling for hours before his window in the Palazzo Doria, and following him, twenty paces behind, on his solitary way along the street that he loved so well, with its view over the sea.

Thanks to Verdi's dreamy nature and habits he remained unnoticed in spite of his monologues and his swinging arms. And though he was not himself conscious of it, his whole being burned to be noticed by his famous foe. All his thoughts, every breath he drew, every movement, every dream, even his sleep, signalled "Verdi !"

Several years after the famous letters to Ricordi, with the last penny of his fortune he established the "Musical Alchemist." Except a few ambition-crazed wretches who loved all destruction, no one read the yellow-covered journal. Although only twenty copies of each issue were printed (it came down to three), it cost the editor a round sum.

This "Alchemist" in its sterile insanity ate up the whole of Sassaroli's time. In clear moments when he turned over his music or opened the dusty piano he sometimes realized with horror how low his dementia had brought him.

Was he not a musician ? Was he born for inkslinging and word-mongering ? Oh, if only once before it was too late, music might speak in him again ! All, all would then be changed. And there was—he doubted it less from day to day—a wealth of dazzling originality, of artistic achievement, of star-reaching greatness in his store of music. He knew this so surely that it hardly occurred to him to count up the value of his treasure. He had no account to render to himself or to the world ! Was his music not condemned to remain unheard because a wirepuller and a press agent decreed it so ? Could there be any other reason for it ? He dared not let himself recognize any other reason for the misfortunes of his genius.

Never ! never ! never !

Once more he lurked by the door of the Doria palace. Once more he struggled with his cries, his thundering heart-beats, his murderous thoughts, as the Maestro came out of the house in his dark-brown coat, the wide-brimmed hat on his grey, fatherly head, and blinked with puckered honest eyes at the sun.

One morning he followed his victim into the railway station and stood close by him while he bought a first-class ticket *via* Milan to Venice.

Hurrying home, Sassaroli drew his last gold piece from the bank, packed his rusty handbag, laying a couple of copies of the "Alchemist" on the top, and by the next train he travelled third class to Venice.

An enthusiastic optimism filled him. He felt that the enemy had taken up a weak position.

5

With the almost supernatural instinct of hatred, Sassaroli very soon discovered the Maestro's whereabouts in Venice. His instinct told him that Verdi was in trouble, more defenceless than in Genoa, and that here was the field on which, at last, they should meet face to face.

Up and down the streets, under the low arches, over the bridges, past the churches and the markets, he followed the Maestro, and even had the courage once for half a second to look into his astonished eyes. It was clear he must speak with Verdi, and obtain relief by unloading upon him the whole accumulation of his curses.

Circumstances, too, sustained the courage of Sassaroli. Here in Venice he had found old friends, a former pupil who was organist of a little church, and a city-bred contemporary of his youth. These two still esteemed him; he was the accomplished musician to them, and when he showed them the "Alchemist" they admired him still more as a writer and art critic. The respect of these simple souls completed the overthrow of his wavering balance. Superstitiously, he said nothing to them of his dark purpose. Like a trampled plant he began to revive, colour came into his cheeks, he even made up his mind to invoke the aid of the dentist when the prize money on which he now counted securely should be paid to him. Why and whence it would come he did not clearly know, but in his darkened heart he felt that the fortune of the future depended on his holding speech with Verdi.

He would stand before him, tower over him at his full height, and with a flash of his eye annihilate the old success-snatcher. Kneel before him should this ignorant press-slave and publisher's hireling—kneel before him, weeping and crying for mercy, wringing his hands! For he knew secrets at which humanity would shudder! How should this Herr Verdi have written his operas himself? Did he not live in the country, the poor parson of a forgotten parish who knew nothing except how to read his prayer book? All that was needed was patience and the true creator of Verdi's music would be made known.

Day and night Sassaroli dreamed of the great encounter with his enemy, and hourly his courage waxed.

The Maestro Verdi had slept well and awakened full of cheerful interest in life. All trouble seemed to be forgotten in this morning hour as he dressed and drank the cup of black coffee that formed his usual breakfast.

Immediately he sat down at his work-table. There before him lay the "Alchemist," that abject piece of folly. The Maestro left it lying where it lay—perhaps to innure himself to the sordidness of life. In the meantime the story of Sassaroli's Aïda letters had recurred to him. He knew them only as a reader of the Musical Gazette. Ricordi had dealt with them himself without bothering the Maestro over so trumpery a matter, who now saw the shabby yellow title-page by daylight for the first time.

Suddenly the pictorial title turned to the living picture of a person, and there stood before the Maestro's eyes the tall figure that he had seen last night at the door of the hotel shaking his fist in the air. That *was* Sassaroli. Verdi did not doubt it for another moment, or that it was this man who had given his servant the lampoon, and he said to himself: "This charlatan will come here in an hour or two, and I will see him; perhaps I may get some ideas for my villain, Edmund."

Then he settled to his solitary attack upon Lear.

In the meantime Sassaroli was already wandering round the house. Quickly, all too quickly, fled the minutes, and soon the hour of the duel must strike. He was not afraid; he only wanted to prolong the exciting moments of anticipation. He stood on the landing-bridge looking at the tiny steamboat and the little sailing craft from Chioggia that were being loaded, but he saw nothing; he sat down for half an hour in a bar and bought a paper, though he could not read a word. Certain as he was of his victory, he saw to his surprise that his hands, lying on the marble top of the table like two objects that had nothing to do with him, were trembling.

Darkly he saw the eyes of all Italy gazing thither in this great hour of the unmasking of truth. It pleased him to remember that he had put a revolver in his pocket. He was prepared for whatever might come.

Not for a long time had Maestro Verdi worked so well as on this morning. The little scene of the possessed pilgrin had gained a clear, definite outline,

Now a short *andantino* was appearing, its four voices tramping across the ladder of the staves in strange, hollow harmonies.

It was not, indeed, a moment of inspiration, but his hand seemed facile again. Perhaps it was well, after all, that he had taken this infernal trip to Venice.

The Maestro interrupted his work when he heard his servant coming. But before Beppo had opened his mouth Verdi already knew that Vincenzo Sassaroli was there.

The man stood in the room. The Maestro's blue eyes, that always seemed to see something behind the object at which they looked, flashed in his face as he waited for him to speak.

Immediately Sassaroli realized that he had forgotten to reckon with the effect that the personality of his adversary produced. For a moment he felt abashed before this austere figure and fame-encircled head. It irritated him that he could not prevent his lower jaw from dropping and letting the dumb, toothless mouth fall open. He felt that he had taken his first blow.

Verdi still waited. He saw an indescribable mixture of expression in this man's eyes; mendicity, boldness, scorn, familiarity, anger and malice all blended in one.

In spite of his disgust the Maestro could not but feel a sort of pity for the sick and aged appearance of his visitor, and though he had not intended to speak first, he broke the silence in a friendly tone.

"Sit down, Maestro Sassaroli."

What? Verdi, the object of his deadly hatred, to call him "Maestro," that sweet title which he had not enjoyed for so long! That it should come now from that mouth, that mouth! The erotic undercurrent that lies in all hatred swept through Sassaroli's heart. Obediently, timidly almost, he sat down by the writing table. A glance showed him the unfinished score of the music in the Maestro's wild, well-known writing. He felt his most important argument melting away from him. But he would not believe it too readily! It might be the Maestro's own writing, but who could tell whether the country parson wasn't copying something from print? That could even be made to serve his purpose. With a little guttural laugh Sassaroli put aside his doubt and took up the new theory. In his careless, sturdy attitude the Maestro stood before the seated man who, to his discomfort, had to raise his eyes when he looked at the other.

In speaking with his adversaries, among whom Verdi reckoned theatre directors, publishers, singers, tenants and lawyers, it was always his habit to stand while the other was seated. It was an almost unconscious, strategic move for superior position. The Maestro could not bear to see his opponent's head on a level with his own.

"Why have you come to me, Maestro Sassaroli?"

"I . . ."

His visitor began to stammer. Curse him, the fellow was making him nervous.

"You sent me this pamphlet, Maestro Sassaroli. You are the editor?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, I understood you were a composer."

"I *am* a composer. I *am* a composer."

He struck his chair with his fingers and stamped his foot. The other spoke quietly without any inflection in his voice.

"In that case this sort of disgusting gutter presswork is unworthy of you as a musician."

"You—you—you speak to me of unworthiness?"

Sassaroli, glad to be able to throw off his embarrassment in an outburst of passion, jumped to his feet and cried:

"No power on earth shall shut my lips. I will bring the truth to light; from your face, above all others, will I tear the mask. That will be a worthy enough task for my disgusting gutter presswork. I will cleanse the Augean stable of music."

Verdi's manner became still milder.

"And what have you against me, Maestro Sassaroli?"

"You have bribed the press from the first. Even the success of Nabucco was bought. Your rich father-in-law Barezzi, whom you selected so carefully, provided the means for all your machinations. You hob-nob with the critics day and night, you push yourself in everywhere, you are puffed in the press to the detriment of all other musicians; for years you have kept the Impresario Merelli in a cage, you have intrigued against foreign music, you have shamelessly laid siege to the Parisian opera houses, and by all these dastardly methods you have built up your so-called fame in the eyes of the world. Nor is that all. But there is an Avenger of right—perhaps not *one* Avenger only. . . ."

Sassaroli had to interrupt his denunciation to swallow back the foam that was dripping from his lips. Politely the Maestro watched his pursuer deal with this ludicrous embarrassment, and waited for a while before he answered.

"Part of your accusation is familiar to me, since I read your pamphlet last night. May I ask, Maestro Sassaroli, what evidence you have of all this?"

"Evidence! Wait, Herr Verdi, and I will show you evidence—most of it is in my hand already, excellent evidence! I am only waiting to complete the full web of evidence against you."

"Surely it is rather short-sighted of you, then, to give me notice beforehand."

"The warning will not help you. Ah, how it does me good to tell you, the child of fortune, the truth for once!"

"It is not the whole truth. You have a motive in coming here to vent your wrath."

"You do not write your works yourself."

"Oh, Maestro Sassaroli, I cannot believe that you have been guilty of helping a plagiarist."

"The proof will come."

"Possibly. But there is a great deal to be read in the 'Alchemist' as to which you are pleased to be silent. You accuse me of having intrigued to keep your work off the stage."

"Yes, only by intrigue, not by the quality of your work, you have blocked the way to my opera. By force, by stratagem, by the practices of your music-monger, Herr Ricordi. You were terrified at my success."

"What if I say that I do not know a note of your music!"

"Herr Verdi, it is well known who was Saverio Mercadante's best pupil."

"Hm! And you believe that I have such extraordinary influence that I have been able to hinder your career."

"In that influence above all things do I believe."

"And why, if my influence seems so great to you, did you not enlist it on the side of your opera?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, instead of hating and attacking me, did you not come to me and say: 'Maestro Verdi, help me!'"

"You! Ask help of you!"

The Maestro's face grew serious.

"If my music is the cause of the failure of yours to find its public, I am almost tempted to arrange for its production myself."

Sassaroli stared at him speechlessly. He could not see the drift of the thing at all.

The Maestro took a few steps as if turning it over in his mind again.

"By this time, by the work of a long life, I have earned the power to get a good opera by a gifted composer performed in the Scala theatre at Milan."

As the word "Scala" fell on Sassaroli's ears a cold fever seized him. The Scala—the last, highest object at which melodrama aimed. The Scala, the greatest and, after Parisian opera, the most world-wide source of musical honour. The room and the world outside the window swam round him like waves round a boat. Every nerve of his embittered nature strained as a man, deafened by the noise of the wind, struggles to stand upright before a storm. The situation had been taken out of his hands by some irresistible power. All

his impracticable, insane plans must go. Unquestionably, his enemy had the best of it. The proprietor of Saint Agatha, the hard bargainer, had gripped his victim fast with the first snap of his jaws.

"Now, Maestro Sassaroli, have you an opera written ?"

The broken-down musician gave no answer. The Maestro once more manœuvred for advantage.

"Will you not take your seat again ?"

Unresistingly the man sank into his subordinate position. The Maestro came nearer.

"I asked whether you have an opera, Maestro Sassaroli, ready for production ?"

Sassaroli pulled himself together. He flashed a dark, scornful look at the face standing over him.

"I have not one, but many operas, completed, whose success is certain. But I have resolved not to submit them to the world to-day. I have prohibited their production."

"Then that question is settled."

The Maestro shook himself as if bodily rejecting his idea. Sassaroli imitated the movement passionately, and asked, hardly forming the words articulately:

"Settled ? How ?"

"I might, perhaps, under certain circumstances, have arranged it for you."

"Ar—ranged it ?"

"Yes ! Arranged that your latest work should be put on the stage, at the Scala, if possible."

Sassaroli's head fell, strangely awry, upon his left shoulder. The lips were pressed together. The traces of a riot of bitter thoughts on his face filled the Maestro with more horror than all the former hatred.

A last glimmer of clarity in his darkened senses warned him of danger, and he muttered:

"Mockery!"

"No ! I swear that under certain circumstances I would have helped you. The conditions do not matter; you do not desire my help. Good !"

Sassaroli's hands went up to his neck.

"No!" he cried, abruptly.

Then there came, in an unrecognizable child's voice from his twisted mouth, the words:

"Oh, help me, Maestro Verdi!"

"How can I help you, if you, in word and writing, call me a blackguard; if you have proof of it that you can produce when you choose ?"

Sassaroli's head now sank forward. But for the word "Scala" his mind was blank. His thoughts struggled like a dying horse that is still spurred to run.

"You see, Maestro Sassaroli, what hatred and devilry can bring a man to. Now we must make a bargain with each other. I will write a few words here on my visiting card. They will open to you not only the closed door of the Scala offices, but also secure for your work the careful and favourable attention of the musical and dramatic managers. They have only to hear the first fifty bars of your music and they will decide. I lay the visiting card here on the table between us."

Sassaroli's hands shook as he looked at the fateful piece of paper.

Verdi paused before he said in a sharper tone:

"Listen to me now, Maestro Sassaroli. Now comes your part of the bargain. Are you prepared to recall the accusations which you have brought against me ?"

The devil that the magic word "Scala" had cast out whined again.

"Well ?"

"I will do all that truth requires."

Verdi's low, friendly voice rose strongly now.

"I swear to you that I ask nothing from you but the truth. Write!"

Sassaroli sobbed, his eye fixed on the visiting card. Verdi drew a sheet of paper in front of him and put a pen in his hand.

"Write!"

A new hope conquering his hate, the man wrote nervously after the Maestro's dictation:—

"I hereby declare that all the accusations, charges and aspersions which in my words and writings I have brought against the Maestro Verdi are totally unfounded and malicious lies, for which I had no motive but envy, hatred and revenge."

"Sign this paper with your name, if you please, as I have signed mine."

"Scala," thought the vanquished man: then he shuddered suddenly and, pushing the paper away, stood slowly up. Verdi followed his movements with watchful eyes, ready for any danger. Sassaroli's tall figure towered, it seemed to be rising to the ceiling. For a long time he clenched his hand in his pocket. Verdi's eyes commanded him. The tall figure collapsed into the chair and he signed the declaration.

Verdi remained silent and motionless for thirty seconds, then taking up the sheet and the card together he tore them both across and threw the pieces into the wastepaper basket.

Sassaroli started up with a cry. With cold, unfaltering eyes the other stood before him.

"*Herr* Sassaroli, have I now proved to you that you are more corrupt than you pretended to have proved me?"

Against this voice that did not trouble to raise itself very high, there was no answer. Sassaroli stood like a degraded soldier. The voice went on:

"Before you came I had set you down as a slanderous scoundrel. Had you pointed a revolver at my head, you would at least have been a manlier scoundrel and I should have helped you. You are only a miserable, second-rate, characterless coward. Your vanity has been your undoing. Go!"

Sassaroli had only one thought—to fly from the sport and from the horrid presence of his enemy. At a safe distance he would devise a new plan of revenge. He turned to the door, but a look held him fast.

"Sir! I take mankind damned seriously. I do not play with men. With my offer to smooth the way before your opera, I very soon threw you out of your ridiculous pose of virtue. That was a fault on my part of which I have as little reason to boast as you have to be proud of your readiness to fall into the trap. You need not carry a note from me in your hand. Take your music to the Scala and send in your name to Franco Faccio, the leader of the orchestra. He will have been instructed by me to give it a hearing. Beppo, Beppo, show this gentleman out!"

When Sassaroli with an involuntary, submissive bow had disappeared, Verdi sat down wearily and stared at the table. The fact that men hated each other, brutishly envious of fortune, talent, greatness, or fame, was degrading beyond measure. No, he would not visit Richard Wagner.

Presently he wrote the following letter to the conductor of the orchestra of the *Teatro alla Scala*:—

"My Dear Franco Faccio—

"A Maestro Vincenzo Sassaroli will bring you his opera. I beg of you to read it with the greatest attention and good will. This composer asserts that I obtain my music by fraud, and that he himself has eclipsed me. Everything is possible in this absurdest of worlds.

"But listen! I will not allow even *one* human being to suffer through me, or to believe that he suffers. Therefore, give his opera a hearing as if you yourself or I had written it.

"I beg that you will send me word of the result to my usual address.

"In haste. Addio, addio.

"Your G. V."

The Maestro put this letter into the box himself, and set out to see his dying friend Vigna.

Sassaroli went back to Genoa the same day. His visit to Verdi had so shaken him that he even avoided seeing his two friends, the organist and the city man, again.

The dilemma in which he found himself now was whether to avail himself of the Maestro's offer and present his opera at the Scala there, or whether to fan the flame of his hate anew. How this internal conflict ended, and whether the "Musical Alchemist," with its senseless bursts of fury, continued to appear, nobody can discover to-day.

At best one may suppose that ambition and hate made a compromise in the old musician's heart. He may have submitted his music and at the same time carried on his insane polemic.

At all events, the chronicles of the Scala theatre in Milan between the years 1883 and 1900 show no trace of an opera by Vincenzo Sassaroli having been accepted or produced.

6

Dott. Cesare Vigna had grown so much worse that his interest in life, past, present and future, had altogether waned, and the Maestro's visit was no longer received by him as an honour. As before, the remote, egocentric atmosphere of the sick room with its odour of dissolution affected Verdi painfully.

He was glad that he had not to sit there alone with his wasted, yellow-faced friend who, lying unspectacled and toothless in his nightshirt, made a piteous impression as of something denuded and exposed. So small, so sunken was the appearance of the singer who, from his boyhood, had been wont to swagger on high heels in a curled wig and brocaded cloak, swollen with the false greatness and false glamour of the stage.

Doctor Carvagno was attending to the sick man. It was a striking testimony to the doctor's character, that not only was his assistance sought by the Marchese Gritti in the desperate enterprise of keeping death at bay, but his colleagues in the art of medicine also came to him for aid. To them Carvagno was the medical text-book which they had only to open and find the required paragraph to explain every diagnosis that puzzled them. Perfectly unprejudiced, distrusting all written and collective instruction, he believed only and strongly on his intuitive skill. Every fresh case was for him a fresh world through which he travelled like an explorer waging war upon the native forces of dissolution, alert to circumvent all their tricks and stratagems. Beatifically, with closed eyes, his patients felt the breath of life for which their choked frames were struggling, streaming from the doctor as he bent over them. They believed in him implicitly although his experiments were often rash and daring, and they loved him in spite of the cold, impersonal vehemence with which he treated them.

This was a man to whom the Maestro was bound to be drawn instinctively; one who loved men and threw himself with untiring energy upon the thing before him, not resting until he had conquered it. A stream of sympathy flowed between them immediately, not less readily on account of the surprise of Dr. Carvagno, who already knew the Maestro by name and by sight. However free the Maestro might be from the stirrings of vanity, he was not indifferent to the pleasure of being held in esteem.

As the two men were leaving the sick room together and descending the stairs, the Maestro asked the doctor his opinion as to Vigna's fate. Without a trace of professional reticence Carvagno replied,

"Signor Maestro, I confess frankly that most of our prophecies are so much empty breath. I have seen men return from death's door before now. Only a fool denies the existence of miracles. Miracles are the commonplaces of my calling. The only trouble with Vigna is that he will not help me at all. The

sabotage of his own life by the patient is always dangerous. There is an art of sickness as there is an art of life. I have only one patient who is really gifted in the art, and he is a centenarian."

"Marchese Gritti?"

"Yes, Gritti! He is a Colossus, a Titan, a Prometheus among patients."

They passed into the street, and with a very friendly air the Maestro turned to the doctor.

"Which is your way, Dr. Carvagno?"

"I'm on my rounds, but if I may, and if I shan't disturb you, I will walk with you, Signor Maestro Verdi. I may not have such good fortune again."

"No! I mustn't take you away from your patients. I am only a musician. But, if you will allow me, I will come with you."

As Carvagno modestly tried to disclaim this honour, the Maestro added frankly:

"Oh, it's a sort of adventure for me to accompany you."

Leaving the inner circle of the city where Vigna lived, the two men took their way over many wide-spanned and sharply arched bridges into the newly built north-eastern quarter. With his hands behind his back the Maestro walked a little ahead, or rather, Carvagno kept a little distance of respect between himself and the great man. It seemed right to him to express his feeling thus.

Verdi put many questions to the doctor, but none that concerned himself or his health. All with whom he came in contact were to the Maestro subjects of study in the interests of his work. The urge to learn was always strong in him, and he questioned people searchingly about the circumstances of their daily work. But he never spoke of his own.

Carvagno took advantage of a pause in the conversation to introduce this theme.

"We doctors have all more or less difficulty in satisfying our love of music, Maestro; I should like to ask you a question that lies very near my heart."

"And your question?"

"Perhaps you are aware that during the autumn season Traviata was performed at La Fenice. When I heard that entrancing music again after a long interval, a question rose in my mind of which I should like to speak, if it will not bore you too much. You will probably find it very dull."

"No, no, I am interested."

"In your dramas, Signor Maestro, you always portray the same type of woman, the loving, devoted creature who is sacrificed by men or sacrifices herself for them. Is that not so?"

"It has never occurred to me so. I must think it over."

"Will you allow me to give you a few instances? There is the betrayed Gilda, who is devoted to her betrayer, and gladly receives the dagger-thrust; and Violetta, who resigns her butterfly existence, out of a great and pure love, in order that the reputation of a burgher's son may not suffer, but cannot surmount the renunciation. Leonore, in Trovatore, dies by her own hand to save her lover. Louisa Miller suffers the fate of all opera heroines. And, finally, there is Aïda, who voluntarily shares her lover's grave."

"As far as these women are concerned you are right."

"In all the women of your operas, Signor Maestro, the phenomenon of human suffering is presented. They present it by means of heart-shattering melodies. How differently does Bizet see woman! As a shameless, devilish force of nature."

The blue eyes of the Maestro were turned on the doctor.

"Do you know Paris?"

"No."

"Only in terms of Paris can one rightly interpret Carmen. When I first stood on the pavement of that love-worthy, hate-worthy town—it is an age now since then—I was haunted by the feeling that the earth trembled under me. It seemed to me that under these avenues and boulevards were great engine-rooms

with their driving belts whirring day and night. It was, of course, only a hallucination of the nerves. But I soon recognized that there was a certain truth in it. Paris, the whole of France, was ceaselessly at work. And for what ? Only for women, on feminine things. Hecatombs of the wares of fashion, dresses, hats, shoes, that, like the flowers, are born in spring and wither in autumn, and all for the use of women. Think of all the side industries that contribute to this maddest of all forms of labour, the weaving of stuffs, the manufacture of cosmetics, and all the appurtenances of frivolity. Yes, all the skill and industry of Paris seems to flow into the boudoir. Carmen is this Paris disguised in tawdry Spanish costume and transplanted here. I don't know whether you understand me ?"

"What you say seems to me to be sincerely and truly observed, Signor Maestro."

"We Italians, God be thanked, have not gone so far. The barbaric strain in our blood saves us. We still want children. Carmen, the Gallic woman, tries the dubious experiment of replacing motherhood by piquancy and charm. In her man-destroying luxury she revenges herself upon men for her barrenness, for the decadence which refuses to produce and nourish offspring. This is the irretrievable calamity which has overtaken France. Even among us Italians you no longer find families of fifteen children or more, though I have known several such myself. We have sent abroad an ignorant and unrespected but numerous brood. It is the day of the north now, but we are only at the beginning. As long as a race produces mothers it cannot die."

"And the women of your operas, Maestro ?"

"When man sees in woman not the bringer of joy but a whimpering creature shrinking from the pangs of motherhood, he must lose that feeling of reverence and worship and sympathy which as a boy he finds so strong within him. Perhaps it is this feeling that I have seized in the case of the unfortunate heroines whom you have named. But this is only a conjecture, for I have never thought about such questions."

"Sympathy with women!" Carvagno repeated slowly. "Yes, that is the word for your music, Maestro. Sympathy with women."

For a second Verdi stood with strangely bent head as if listening to something within himself. Then he stepped on again.

"I will tell you a little incident of my early youth, Dr. Carvagno. I was fourteen years old at the time, and although I was called the organist of our village church, I had to help my father in his business. In our little shop we sold not only food and the utensils of daily life, but also the few well-known medicines that the village people used.

"Every fortnight we had a very welcome visitor whose coming kept me always happy and amused. This was Betteloni, a travelling village surgeon who used to get his supplies from us.

"Betteloni was only a market-place quack of the old type such as love-potions are bought from in the Donizetti comic opera. How good and truly popular that is, and how little justice the modern world has done Donizetti !

"Betteloni, who was an unrivalled liar, braggart and wit, scandalized our country Pharisees by telling fortunes all the week, but on Sundays he transformed himself into a respectable musician. He played the trombone in one of the village bands (*banda de campagna*) that are the joy of Italian hearts. The fact that my own first March was played by this 'Philharmonic Company' will win me the sympathy of all musicians and tincture-mongers.

"When he visited us Betteloni always begged my father to let me go with him on his rounds, and I often spent a half or whole holiday with him. It was a real festival for me when, by the side or on top of his donkey cart, I went round the village shops while he gathered the people round him on the green—teacher, actor, politician, strategist, journalist, propagandist, mimic, weather prophet and satirist in one person.

"Then, when he was invited by the village people to visit their sick relatives

he would lay aside the horn spectacles and grin of the buffoon and, signing to his clients to lead the way, he would beckon me, like a duly hired Famulus, to follow him. Once we went to a house where it happened that I had to wait in a front room to watch the donkey and cart as they stood by the door. Before he disappeared into the other room there came from it a woman's cry so terrible and unnatural that my heart stood still as if it would never beat again. When the quack-salver had gone in, this shriek swelled into a continuous agonized crying that never fell or wearied. To this day I do not know how I got through that fearful hour, or bore the torture of that terrible crying.

"Child as I was, I wept and prayed and offered vows to God if only He would have mercy and stop that heart-rending voice. I did not know when the screaming ceased; I was stunned and helpless and streaming with sweat when Betteloni came out and began washing his hands in brownish water."

" 'That was a bad case, my boy,' he said. 'You see, that's how children come into the world. Poor souls, the women !'

"For weeks after this experience I was shattered, food sickened me and I had terrible dreams. My mother was beside herself, for she pictured me sinking into a decline. My heart had taken a monstrous blow; my childhood, my happy dreams were over. That unceasing cry fevered my brain and my feeble thoughts were powerless to drown it.

"I swore to myself that I would never be the cause of such cruelty to a woman, that I would be a monk; God knows what I did not swear.

"It took me years to get over the effects of those cries. . . .

"Well, Dr. Carvagno, I have made a long story of it. It was not for nothing you happened to fall in with me. No, I shall never compose a Carmen. What if there are a few heartless, avaricious girls in the world ? Literature is trifling with demon-worship when it weeps over the infatuation of a worthless, credulous boy for a brainless gipsy girl, while millions and millions of women so often in their lives must raise that heart-rending cry. What should we men, in our own guilt, not forgive to them ?"

When the Maestro had finished, Carvagno remained as if his thoughts were crowding too fast on him, some distance behind the quiet figure striding on ahead. Both were silent for some time. At last, looking kindly over his shoulder, Verdi said:

"My dear doctor, you must go. I have brought you, as I feared I should, too far out of your way."

Carvagno stood still.

"I am unfortunate, Signor Maestro. I have to call here."

Verdi looked round. It was a fairly quiet part of the town, that only by the narrowness of its streets declared itself to be part of Venice. The houses were not old, but built with the greatest parsimony of space and utilized to the last corner.

Before one of the doors stood a well-dressed young woman and a strikingly fair child: they seemed to be waiting. The woman's face brightened as she recognized the doctor, and she was hurrying forward to him when she noticed the strange man and drew back. Carvagno made a friendly gesture of recognition and said:

"Patients of mine ! At least, the man is ! A German and a musician. The devil's own combination."

"The child is very pretty."

The Maestro, like all who saw him, was charmed by the beauty of little Hans. He always looked at children with a sense of melancholy, he hardly knew why, but he craved the sight of them constantly. Carvagno continued:

"I have never seen a lovelier child. Rather mysterious people though. Badly off, but won't show it."

"Go to your duties now, doctor. I have kept you too long."

"I am sorry, Signor Maestro, that you have to go back so far by yourself."

"Lonely walks are my favourite pastime."

The doctor took leave of the Maestro with a respectful warmth that, like everything else about his new acquaintance, pleased Verdi greatly. Still gripping his hand he said:

"You will not mention to anyone that I am here, that you have spoken with me. It would have very inconvenient consequences for me. You promise me, Dr. Carvagno ?"

"It is an order, Signor Maestro."

The doctor spoke to the mother and stroked the little boy's cheek as the three disappeared together into one of the uninteresting houses.

The Maestro, his hands at his back, his steady eyes fastened on the distance, turned and took perhaps twenty steps forward. Then he stood still and, as if under some impulse he could no longer resist, he looked back. But the golden-haired child was gone.

CHAPTER VI

MATHIAS FISCHBÖCK

1

"In Music as in Love one must be sincere."—*From a speech of Verdi, quoted by Gino Monaldi.*

RICHARD WAGNER had not been seen on the Piazza at the usual hour for some time past.

Italo stood on the outer periphery of the circle which the master, in his inexhaustible vitality, had gathered round him in Venice. Aristocrats, artists, Russians, Bohemians, formed the graded hierarchy of this circle, a group of over-refined persons of whom only a few ever came face to face with Wagner.

Many years earlier, when the German was writing Tristan in Venice, very few people had concerned themselves with him, but this winter he was the latest fashion, not only in Venice, but in the greater world of Italy.

Italo had learned that Wagner was as well as ever, and that the only reason he was never seen was that he was too busy upon a new philosophic work to waste his afternoons. The young man was almost glad that he need not reproach himself with unfaithfulness if he no longer frequented the Piazza.

For the first time in his life Italo was depressed.

Depression is always the knocking of our consciousness upon a door which we refuse to open. When we are resolute enough to allow it to cross the threshold the depression passes.

Italo did not open the door, he bolted it firmly. Weakness and love of pleasure disputed whimpering within him so that he could no longer greet the spring morning with the sense of joy and strength which it should have brought. Since he had known Margherita Dezorzi his life had wavered between two points without strength to turn definitely to either.

He often yearned for Bianca, yet when he was with her he felt himself alien to her, trapped and unhappy. She lived much alone, for Carvagno had now set up private quarters in the ambulatorium of the hospital in order, as he said, to enable him to cope better with his gigantic task.

Italo could not fathom the mysterious change in Bianca. Her soul gazed out with a knowledge that he could not share into a distance that his eyes could not reach; it visited remote places that he could not approach. He, who had felt himself superior to the rustic woman kneeling in the church, was too slight, too ignorant of life even to understand the problem. Much that Bianca said and did shocked and angered him because he could not grasp or comprehend her motives.

From the Pescuria she had bought a large tortoise. For hours she would sit,

bent over the creature, with a basket of lettuce leaves by her, and watch the flat serpent's head reach out from under the shell. And she made no attempt to busy herself with baby-linen as is the first thought of other women in her condition. In the street she would repulse an old blind beggar woman with loathing and give all the money she had at the moment to a strong young street loafer.

Often some sentence fell from her lips in which Italo could not make out any meaning though it was clear that it was spoken in bitterness. Often she would write some simple word—man, or dog or house—but it was not these objects he saw in a sudden flash of partial intelligence, but a second, and to him unrecognizable, form behind them.

She had entirely ceased to speak of the future. No word of anguish, of complaint against her lot, did Italo hear now. This silence awed him more than any other strangeness in her, he did not know whether she thought of her impending hour with hopelessness or confidence. His own mouth was closed. Alternately he seemed to perceive in her an unfathomable madness, a strange wantonness or an unspoken certainty.

One morning they went together to the Lido in a little steamboat, and walked down the deserted acacia alley from the lagoon to the shore.

In long, heavy waves the misty, overclouded Adriatic lapped the strand. Only two crooked, wind-swollen sails stood up out of the mist through which the feeble sun sent but a few splinters of light. Some fifty yards out a relay of half-naked freezing men were straining and shouting as they dragged at a heavy net, which remained invisible and apparently unmoved.

The waves were gradually encroaching upon the sands along which the two lovers wandered in the direction of Malamocca. Their feet sank in the grey surface that retained the impress in deep moist footprints.

Italo saw that the feet of his companion left deeper and even larger traces in the sand than his own. These heavy footprints filled him with a sense of unhappiness and unfaithfulness, and he could not master the desire that stung him for the lighter swinging footsteps and the figure of another.

The restless winter sea had thrown myriads of unfortunate crabs out of their element, the water, which they wriggled and struggled to regain. Motionless and flat lay the pools left by the tide over the dying mussels, the seaweed and the pale bony stalks of the sea rushes.

Darker and darker grew the sky, ever angrier the sea, and still more sharply came the salt-tasting spray upon the lips of the lonely pair. They wandered silently and apart as if they walked not for pleasure but in pursuit of some important purpose that could not be deferred.

Suddenly Bianca stood still with a little cry. Before her lay the body of an enormous ship-rat with exaggeratedly long, stiffly-outstretched legs and a thin cord of tail. The grey catlike face with its bristling pointed nose, and the reddish lappets of the ears were plainly visible. The body was half eaten and swarmed with vermin. Italo, suddenly remembering to have heard that it was dangerous for a pregnant woman to look at something horrible, drew Bianca away saying, "We'll turn down here."

Nothing was more horrible, more unsupportable to Italo's nerves than the sight of putrefaction. As a child he had once seen flies swarming over a dead snake. The experience threw him into a fever that lasted for days. Since then he never entered a kitchen without suffering agonies of dread lest he should see the plucked body of a chicken. Bianca stared long at the rat—she seemed to be unable to take her eyes from the hateful sight. As they retraced their steps Italo ground his teeth, the misery and repugnance in his heart was unbearable. After five minutes' silence Bianca stood still, and with her eyes fixed far out on the sea she said:

"So will the woman become, that you have taken."

For a moment it seemed to Italo as if he must do something to break the horrible spell of this sea-curse that had fallen upon them, but he found no means. Still searching the invisible horizon Bianca said:

"What does she want, with her lying tongue ? She has time enough. Only a few more days."

"In God's name, Bianca, what are you saying ?"

She seemed to wake up and to know no more than he. Quickly, as if he could be alone with her no longer, Italo drew her away.

Later they sat together in the hall of the Stabilimento drinking something warming. Bianca stroked Italo's hand. She felt the distress that his sighs betrayed.

"You are sad, my dear, I know. All this is too much for your poor young heart."

"I am tortured day and night, Bianca."

As he said the words, the first that had been spoken of their oppression for long, an angry feeling woke in him that his suffering was needless—might it not after all be Carvagno's child ? Should he not do well to fly to Paris, or Palermo, or Africa or Greenland, anywhere out of reach of all these horrors ? After all, he had done everything possible for Bianca; it was he, not the doctor, who was bearing the brunt. But he hardly recognized the woman now and her malicious humour left him helpless.

Bianca felt the hostility flowing magnetically from his hand.

"I burden you, Italo. Say nothing, I know, I feel it. What have you to do with me now ? But, listen, my dear, I will not be a burden to you, I love you too well. You must be free. I have often pained you with my jealousy. My love, I am not jealous now. Go to the Piazza this afternoon, to the cafés, and find your Wagner again. It will not annoy me and I shall not be lonely. He is a great man and will do you good, you will learn from him. You must become a great artist yourself, my Italo, you play so beautifully. And you must be free ! Free ! This afternoon and always."

"No, Bianca, I don't want to go. I will stay with you . . . this afternoon . . ."

"But I won't be angry, I won't reproach you."

"I will stay with you this afternoon and always, Biancina."

"But you need an hour's enjoyment, my child, to make you happy again."

"Bianca . . . if you won't mind . . . there was something . . ."

"What was it ? Tell me !"

"Well, if you're sure you'll be all right, if you swear you don't mind, I'll go . . ."

"Is it the quartet ?"

"Not exactly ! But this evening there is music at Count Balbi's. A musical soirée. It's very interesting, but you know I don't want to go anywhere against your wish. Tell me whether to go or not."

"Are there to be any women ?"

"No ! Hardly any ! That is . . ."

Italo had resolved to avoid this question, but something he could not control half compelled, half forbade him, to speak the name.

"That is, the Dezorzi is coming."

His senses tingled with a strange pleasure as his lips framed the syllables of that name to the other woman. He must be careful not to let a look, an intonation, a breath betray him. But Bianca, usually so quick to note and answer the unspoken thought, now showed not the slightest suspicion.

"Is she a singer ?"

"Oh yes ! Otherwise she would never have attracted my attention."

"Do you know her ?"

"No, not personally."

The lie rolled smoothly out as if of its own accord.

"I heard her sing in that stupid Ponchielli opera, you remember. She is very good, remarkably so . . ."

And, as if this praise was too bold a stroke, he added:

"Still she seemed to me to be rather affected, perhaps because she is very beautiful—on the stage, at least."

"Do you really want to go to these people, Italo ?"

"No, Biancina, I see you don't like it, that you will be vexed. I won't go. I shall stay at home this evening and work. It's better. This gathering and all gatherings, with music or without music, are dead to me."

Smiling, he kissed Bianca's hand that no longer thrilled him, and calling the waiter, he paid the bill and got up. They went out on the terrace together.

Stiff and unrestful the young man's figure stood out against the wind-swept wall of the sea. The breeze played over the deserted, wintry terrace, stirring his dark hair into disorder, and a few weak rays of light fell on his face.

In that moment Bianca loved him as never before. She could have wept aloud for love, every cell of her being yearned to him submissively. It was one of the moments in which the strongest lay themselves open, defenceless, to death.

Tenderly and sweetly, as in the early moments of their love, she went towards him softly as if to subdue even the sound of her footsteps to his.

The oars of the fishing boat skimmed the dark, self-aware water that was neither sea, nor stream, but seemed to have assumed a fairy-tale personality that blended itself with that of the city. The buoy-and-light apparatus riding on the foreground, the dark forms of the islands further out, the gardens of the city in which only laurel fir, myrtle and cedar were now green, the black-ribbed, bird-haunted sandbanks, everything visible was weighed down and overshadowed by the giant pressure of the mournful, clouded sky.

By the piers of Veneta Marina and Bragora lay the steam-boats, and a few wretched-looking men—their figures, too, wrapped in the wintry mist—moved about their trades or business; no pleasure seekers, no travellers or foreigners came there now.

It was an hour in which even this city, darkened by the northern misery of the century, showed a faded, withered face.

Soon, indeed, will the North entirely devour the city and with her all the golden memories of the Mediterranean epoch. For it rules alone over the earth, the hard symbols of its devil's doctrines are stamped everywhere—its angles, its cubes, its curtness, its machines, its outward precision and inner confusion, its passionless slaughter, its thousand forms of barrackdom, its lifeless, empty productions, its vicious folly, its alcoholism and intellectual debauchery, its Americanized persecution of all who stand alone—all the hopeless dreariness of those who plough the ice to sow their grain and have no voice to raise in song. For a thousand years this northern Lucifer lived in barbarism, but now his infection is spreading to every brain.

Scorned and shorn of virtue now, lies the life that is engendered by the sun; the noble indolence, and quiet content in the midst of plenty, the overmastering kiss that knows neither afterthought nor rue, the warm upwelling and sudden cooling of the blood, the daily festival, the unpremeditated dagger thrust, the war that swoops swiftly down with flying banners, the pledging of the enemy again at evening in the common bowl, and the song which enriches the generations, the voice of joy that is never silenced. Sweet, sacred, harmonious life, long since is your star sunk from our sky ! Hail and farewell !

The lovers sat silent on a seat in the bow of the boat, watching joylessly the passing of Palazzo, Piazza, Campanile and the scenes on the canals. At San Toma they landed and stood to take leave of each other, as they had done a thousand times, before the church of the Frari.

"Swear to me, Italo, that you will do what I ask you."

"If it is to banish me from your face, I will not swear."

"You pain me, dear, by your refusal. Swear."

"No ! No !"

"Swear to me that you will go to this soirée to-night."

"Never !"

"But I beg it of you ! I want to see you happy. I am happy only when you are. How I wish that I could go with you ! But a day is coming when we shall enjoy everything together. I know it."

"I don't want you to make sacrifices for me, Bianca. Believe me, I don't care about it at all."

"No, no, my life, it is no sacrifice. It is my warmest, sincerest wish. I know that you are true to me and will be true."

"Yes, Bianca, I am true to you."

"Then go to Balbi's. I will be so happy this evening thinking of you and saying, 'Now he is laughing, now he is talking, now he is enjoying himself, a happy boy again.' Go ! It is no sacrifice."

"Is it really no sacrifice to you, Bianca ? I can't believe it."

"I swear it. And now swear, swear to me that you will do as I ask you."

"We shall see, my love; my dear, my only love ! I can't tell you. I will do what your *true* wish is."

At the door of the house she kissed him so strangely, with the whole intensity of her nature, that all the way home he was shaken, undecided and doubly unhappy.

2

Margherita Dezorzi had finished singing, a carefully selected programme of old Venetian Canzonetti and Arias. Her voice had carried the company away, not by its strength—cultivated Italian opinion was then reacting from the spell of the virtuoso singer—for Margherita Dezorzi's voice was neither orotund nor powerful, but by its softly veiled energy and expressiveness.

In her face, as in her voice, the clear beauty that enraptured her audience when she appeared was heightened by an untheatrical, maidenly austerity of manner that spoke only of the pure ambition of the artist to excel. A closer inspection might have betrayed to a practised eye, in the slightly hard outline of the long oval face with its dark, colourless complexion, some of the characteristics of the Venetian populace from which she sprang; its vulgarity had long been conquered, but there remained an inherited strength of will that was clearly marked. In the unvarnished simplicity and quiet of her movements lay something undeclared that to a keen perception had a chilling effect, although it might not be comprehended. But to the greater number it passed unnoticed.

Margherita Dezorzi's figure was one that seemed to be only the living breath within the body of its clothing, and, by its concealment, to evoke the veiled miracle of joy as no revelation could.

Italo felt his nerves responding like the strings of an instrument. It was as if a hand had been laid cunningly on those strings and, stretching them high, had produced and held a chord of intolerable sweetness.

(Was it, perhaps, one of those suspended harmonies of the diminished seventh with its yearning after death, by which the German Romantic had drugged a whole generation ?)

Italo did not yearn for death. He breathed more deeply and secretly prayed that the blissful power of the drug over his eyes or ears or heart might never weaken. As he saw her face and listened to her voice his being was irradiated. It seemed to him that this blessedness was not brought to him by his external senses, but that by some mystic inner eye, ear and sense the girl's image breathed within him. So complete was this illusion that when he looked away and questioned himself, his consciousness held no memory of what her voice or features were. But the overwhelming, self-evoked image lay there within him, actual, sensible, heavy, almost like a stone.

At the sight of this woman his senses seemed to lie dead, desire seemed to be a thing that he had known in some former unreal and animal existence. The shoulder under the silver gauze, the lovely curve of the knee veiled by the gown, the small, light-falling foot excited, not the fever of other loves, but—as it seemed to him—an unknown and spiritual ecstasy.

In this hour his relation to Bianca became something he could not understand. The recollection of that morning's walk by the Lido was like the memory of something horrible and sinful. Oh, that former love of his ! Made up of a

thousand caresses, kisses, familiarities and shameless words, it seemed to him an unclean and infamous thing. In Bianca he had found again the mother of his childhood and the tenderness of the mother of which the child becomes intolerant.

"The man must free himself from the mother," he thought now, boldly, "in order to win the love of the maiden. Jealously and impatiently the mother binds us to earth, desiring only to press us back into her care."

But Margherita caused all that was regrettable and coarse and earthy and troubled in him to disappear, and he tingled to the roots of his hair with an impatient longing to do something heroic, to distinguish himself in some unheard-of way, by means of his talents and his wit.

His handsome, restless face was hot as fire, his skin feverish, and the pulses of his neck were hammering under his collar. In spite of his desire to shine, Italo did not utter a word, though presently he managed to break the spell and did not hesitate to improvise picturesquely at the expense of truth.

They were apparently alone in one of the rooms when Margherita came up to him and asked some question about Wagner. It had gone abroad in Venetian society that Italo had spoken to the master more than once, and this had brought him a certain notoriety. Involuntarily he began to describe imaginary conversations he had held with Wagner, and to invent remarks and opinions for him. He was amazed at the fluency of his own fancy and the wealth of precise and plausible forms it produced. The only thing that mattered was to interest and impress her sufficiently to keep her from leaving him and returning to the other room.

Several times she looked at him with her dark eyes whose expression was strange to him, the look of a gifted ambitious woman who had no passion but her art. Pariah of her race, the woman who leaves her orbit puts into her art a thousand times more will, energy and self-sacrifice than a man.

Italo, in his vanity, quite misunderstood Margherita's look, which was only probing the truth and probability of his tales; it seemed to him to be the token of an understanding, a call from her soul to his. His head swam. In all his frame he felt the glow of the unwitting conqueror.

When the subject was exhausted he only felt that some other news important enough to interest her must be found, and hardly realizing what he was doing he began anew:

"Oh, Miss Dezorzi, I can tell you a great secret, if you will keep it?"

"Ask my mother whether I have ever been known to repeat one. She blames me for holding my tongue too much. Unwomanly, she calls it. But I am not interested in what interests other women. So you may keep your mind easy on that score."

"I have had to swear to my father that I will tell nobody. There is at this moment another famous musician in Venice, though to mention him in the same breath as Wagner is sacrilege—Verdi."

Margherita seemed very much astonished. She came nearer to Italo.

"Oh, Maestro Verdi!" she said. "How splendid! Do you know how long he is staying?"

"Only a few days, as he intends."

"And you know him?"

"Very well. My father is his oldest, one may say his only, friend. But have you any use for old Verdi?"

"I am a singer. And I think he is disparaged a little too hastily nowadays."

Just then another guest passed the pair, and, catching the Maestro's name, immediately entered upon one of those harangues common all over Italy at the time in which either Wagner, by the Conservatives, or Verdi, by the Progressives, was left without a leg to stand on. On this occasion, the younger school being in the majority, the Maestro had the worst of it.

Corteccia, a very Parisian friend of Italo's with a blond painter's beard and haggard cheeks, who was a musician and historian of art, entrenched himself

strongly in his position: Wagner was not only the greatest musician, but also the greatest poet, philosopher and hero that humanity had known in his time; Verdi, over whose trifling powers far too much fuss was made, was, as far as style was concerned, simply the greatest misfortune that had ever befallen Italian art. A bungling professional player to begin with, and later the musical hack of the Risorgimento, he had finally attained a position that was all the more dangerous because he contrived to disguise the coarseness and vulgarity of his style.

"Verdi," concluded the critic in a negligently-stooping attitude, "Verdi and not Rossini or Bellini has brought the ridicule of Europe upon the beautiful original form of our lyric drama. His operas are identical to a hair with the parodies of the variety stage. They are themselves one huge parody."

The Dezorzi listened to this verdict with an air of disagreement. On her smooth, hard young forehead there came an upright line between the eyebrows that undoubtedly foreshadowed a great career. Drawing her scarf over her shoulder she said:

"You are very far wrong, my dear sir. In my opinion you don't understand Verdi's music. I pity the singer and the conductor, too, who should try to produce the horrible schematic stuff you admire. These operas, believe me, are already dead. I have been on the boards four years and I have learned to know what the public likes. When Verdi is played, the house behaves as it does for no other music. We singers do not hear a single cough or word or movement, even the children are quiet. I have often spoken about it with my colleagues. It seems to us as if the audience were singing every melody with us under their breath. And in the lower class theatres, not even under their breath! No doubt, gentlemen, most of you are great musicians, but in this case your opinion is quite inadequate. I will undertake to prove that out despised Verdi will affect you in the same way as others. In a few days we are playing *La Forza del Destino*, and I invite you all to hear it."

Italo, carried away by Margherita's vehemence, unconsciously trimmed his sails and registered a brand new admiration for Verdi in his heart. The blood rushed wildly through his heart and his tongue was loosed.

"If Wagner is more than a man," he retorted to Corteccia, "it is manifestly unjust to compare Verdi, the man, with him. Miss Dezorzi has given us an unanswerable argument. When Verdi is played—*he takes*. No matter if the words are drivelling and his action mechanical—he has rhythm, the very soul of rhythm."

Italo hurried to the piano and illustrated his contention by playing with full weight of finger and pedal the Finale from Traviata, which he knew by heart. While he was playing, he was thinking not of his contention nor of the musician he was defending, but of winning Margherita Dezorzi's admiration.

She went to him and turned over the music, into which he now threw a new expression. As she sang softly to his accompaniment Italo, who was only just beginning to awaken out of his first enrapturement, felt how the melody carried her, soul and body, into another world.

With Bianca he lived only upon earth, and earth weighed upon him with its inflexible laws of cause and consequence. But near this one being whose coming had changed all, who alone could understand his needs, he revelled in the wide spaces of beauty that lie beyond all law.

To his Wagner-anointed fingers these plastic melodies seemed to come now (whence he could not tell), not as if composed by man, but as if they had been lying since the foundation of the world, finished and ready to hand in the twelve links of the octave.

Softly the Dezorzi sang to his playing. He could trace the faint perfume of her body or her clothes, for they were one, and as he saw her light transparent hands he thought, "I have drawn you to me with music."

Renegade that he was, he was not even conscious of his unfaithfulness, not only to Bianca but to Richard Wagner. Of what Margherita was feeling

he did not think, it was almost a matter of indifference to him, for in the strange, incorporeal, nuptial ecstasy he was experiencing there was no demand for response.

A general outcry of admiration rose over Italo's piano playing. He had already been known as a brilliant violinist, but now they found that he was a born pianist. They swore that even Lizst, who still lingered in Venice, was outclassed.

His infatuation and this unexpected result of it seemed to transform the ironically reticent manner of Italo completely. He became eloquent, throwing epigrammatic sentences into every conversation, and dominating the circle that for the most part was composed of men older than himself. He was so young and handsome and enthusiastic that they allowed him to go uncontradicted. Such fires are not dangerous.

Only one thing troubled him. Margherita had not uttered a word of praise. After the scene at the piano she did not seem to be particularly interested either in his gifts or his appearance. She had become thoughtful, and kept a preoccupied silence or spoke to her mother, who sat heavy and immobile and somewhat animal, throned in a chair. If Italo had not been so self-intoxicated and bemused by his sudden enravishment he might have felt that Margherita was displeased by his change of manner. Presently she left the room where he was displaying his talents to impress her.

He found her again in one of the smaller rooms bestrewn with antiques that are typical of the Venetian palaces. He hoped for some decisive word from her, though what it should be he hardly knew. But she only turned to him as he stood with his excited eyes fixed on her, and said very quietly:

"Will you do me a favour ?"

"Miss Dezorzi, it would make me happy——"

"Since your father knows Maestro Verdi well, do you think he could induce him to attend our performance of his opera ? It is very important for me."

"I don't know. Verdi is a very busy man and lately he has avoided the theatre, particularly his own stuff, but I give you my word I'll do all I can to bring it about. Here is my hand on it."

Italo started as he took her hand. It was cold, like that of an anæmic person.

"It is very important to me," she said once more, and her smile with its pointed lack of coquetry drugged his senses again.

Towards the end of the evening they were all sitting in the big music room. Count Balbi was speaking. He was, as the initiated know, a wit and a connoisseur, as well as an art dealer who possessed one of the finest collections in Italy. If the Venetian aristocracy of the eighteenth century did not hesitate to set up their banks in the public gambling houses, handling and reckoning their gold with the stony air of the grandee, Count Balbi's private business need not be regarded as out of keeping with his position. He was addressing the Dezorzi with effusive warmth.

Dearest Margherita ! Have you never thought of taking part in one of our wonderful Venetian carnivals ? Oh my dear, you must ! Venice is the only city in the world where the carnival, with its masquerade and miming, preserves its tradition unbroken and its meaning unimpaired. In other towns it has become an empty farce, but not here. The carnival spirit is in our blood. It is the dream of my life to cherish and keep alive this essential trait in our national character. I have got a Carnival committee together; I want to induce the best people who have withdrawn themselves from it for the last century, to take part in the Carnival again. Sweetest Margherita, I have an idea for you, something glorious, unique !"

"But is a professional actress the right person for your purpose ?"

"Darling, that is quite different in your case. You are music itself. To-day you have given us the delight of listening to the canzone and ballads of the past. I shall be everlastingly grateful to you for it. But while you were singing an idea occurred to me."

"What ?"

"I have some wonderful old prints of contemporary figures and scenes out of the very earliest operas that were produced here in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Claudio Monteverdi, who died in Venice, the greatest musician of his day, was the composer of several of those primitive operas."

"Oho," cried somebody. "Another of the Marchese Gritti's friends !" and the company laughed heartily.

Count Balbi took no notice.

"It is true that Monteverdi's greatest opera, and the one which most of my pictures illustrate, was produced first in Mantua, but that makes no difference. There is a little figure of Eurydice, that you positively must copy, Margherita dearest. It is such a charming bit of antique, baroque art, your keen artistic sense will be ravished by it. And you are the only woman I have ever seen who could wear that drapery, the only one."

Balbi produced several prints, and, as he had prophesied, they were all delighted by the charm of the figures and the grace of the draperies. No actress could rival the delicate perfection of these creations. The Dezorzi pored earnestly over the pictures, and the Count turned to her again:

"You see this group ? Orpheus going first with the lyre and Eurydice following him, holding a veil before her face, while Pluto scowls barbarously after them. The Eurydice for the reproduction of this wonderful group in the procession of the sixth we have in yourself, and an hour ago, as I think you will agree, we found the Orpheus in our friend Italo here."

Balbi's suggestion was received with acclamation, Italo and Margherita saying nothing.

"And Pluto ?" asked a voice.

"I think we might cut Pluto out of the group or, better perhaps, replace him. It might not be a bad idea if we brought the old composer himself into the picture. I offer this, naturally, for discussion only."

"And the composer and patriarch of the group must be yourself, Count," cried all the voices.

.. "Well, I certainly don't favour the unreasonable idea of having to scowl at Miss Dezorzi. Besides, I have a portrait of Monteverdi, and the historical accuracy would not suffer, for I happen to resemble him in appearance, as one does sometimes resemble an older man."

"Splendid !" cried several enthusiastic voices. "The group is complete."

Balbi added, "I have some very fine old velvets and brocades which I should like you to use for your costume, Margherita. You must look at the stuff. I would not part with it to any queen to-day. You must see it. Have you made up your mind to consent ?"

The mention of the brocade seemed to make the first impression on the Dezorzi. The flattery of strange and splendid garments was dear to the singer's body. She searched the pictured face of Eurydice for a moment longer before she answered.

"I don't know. We must talk it over again."

With these words she prepared to go. Before Italo could speak to her again, she was already stepping into the gondola. The duenna-like mother followed her cremoniously, barricading the girl off from the world with her massive figure. The dumb mother and her brilliant daughter, occasionally exchanging glances of understanding, made a strangely assorted pair.

The oars splashed in the dark water and the company stood bareheaded in the light of the Count's lantern, watching till the marvellous Margherita had disappeared.

Completely broken by the varied emotions of the day, Italo made his way home. The inevitable had happened, it had been forced upon him by Bianca's generosity—her unconscious playing with fire—or by fate. He had gone to this soirée in the full consciousness of his danger, and now the thing had happened

against which he had been struggling half-heartedly for days—he loved Margherita. Her image rose before his senses as he formed the thought and in the blessedness of the vision no further resistance was possible.

What would happen now? Would the Carnival tableau take place? How could he appear before poor Bianca?

In his torment of love, longing and remorse, he was incapable of seeing even a single day before him. All he hoped for was to lose his burden of conflicting thoughts and self-reproach in sleep.

But the deep, unbroken sleep that the easy conscience of youth enjoys was no longer for him. For the first time in his life he could not lose consciousness, and in the big, airless room beneath him he heard his father, Verdi's friend, walking restlessly, ceaselessly up and down like a lost soul.

Next morning a letter from Count Balbi lay on Italo's table inviting him to attend a meeting of the Carnival Committee.

3

"I declare myself an enthusiastic follower of the musicians of the future, on the one condition that their music shall be neither a system nor a theory, but music."—*From a letter of Verdi to Arrivabene*, 1868.

In winter the island of Giudecca, lying to the south of Venice, enjoys both the morning and the afternoon sun. As lovers of Venice know, the long stretch of the southern coast of Giudecca, with its five canals, its private and semi-private gardens, takes on, during the month of January, the character and climate of a Riviera.

Mostly occupied by English people, these well-cared-for gardens with their long glasshouses, straight rows of vines, and paths strewn with tiny shells instead of gravel, are green all the winter with the hardier sorts of palms, with myrtles and the southern conifers.

Behind one of these gardens full or arbours, pergolas and hothouses, which bears the name of 'Eden,' can be seen a beautiful old villa with a path running under its ancient walls which jut out into the shallow lagoon. In the centre of this sea terrace flanked by cypresses, stands a ruinous pavilion. Here, in winter, a few old men sit on the bench that runs round the inner walls, basking in the sun while they turn over the pages of the Gazettino, or stare at the lagoon.

In all the quietness of Venice, where there are no sounds of traffic but only the short-lived noises of men, this 'Eden' is the quietest spot, partly because not many children with their mothers or nurses find their way there.

To this pavilion, with which he had been acquainted for thirty years, the Maestro used to fly from his fruitless and dispiriting labours upon the Lear opera.

His vague doubts and distresses were soothed as he gazed over the lagoon that, with its reflections covering the nakedness of the swampy bottom like worn, insufficient garments, stretched from Giudecca to the long bar of the Lido, to Malamocco and Pellestrina and out to the island of Chioggia swimming, hardly visible, in the distance.

An hour before noon on the first of February, while the sun shone with an almost summer-like warmth, Maestro Verdi met Dr. Carvagno's patient, Mathias Fischböck, in the pavilion overlooking the lagoon. The acquaintanceship was formed through the medium of the pretty, fair-haired boy whom the Maestro had already seen and had never, in his heart, forgotten.

All Italians are child-worshippers, and this peculiarity of his countrymen was in Giuseppe Verdi's blood also. The loss of his wife and children in early manhood was a catastrophe which he had never surmounted. His childlessness formed the constant background against which the changes of his life unrolled, the undertone in all its music. His second marriage with Giuseppina Strepponi, the singer, had proved to be only a comradeship in which the deepest satisfactions and experiences had no part.

At the sight of children his reserve gave way, and he became tender and envious as a bereaved mother.

Little Hans was gathering shells on the path a little way from his parents. There was that quietness about his play which marks the child brought up under the shadow of family misfortune.

The little boy's prim and charmless German mother was not so plain as had seemed at the first glance. Some unfortunate inclination, an ascetic nature perhaps or some disappointment, seemed to impel her to do everything she took in hand in the hardest, least advantageous way. Her sad, tired eyes were fixed upon her husband as she sat by him in the middle of the circular bench running round the pavilion, and the Maestro, who had taken his place near the door, could observe them easily.

As a breeze rose and the sun was clouded for an instant, the wife spread a plaid over her husband's knees, but seeing he seemed annoyed by her care, she folded the shawl again and laid it on the bench. Dr. Carvagno came into the Maestro's mind at the moment, as he recognized the woman and child whom he had seen waiting before the door of their home. This young man, then, was the patient, but there was nothing to show the nature of the disease. He did not cough and seemed too broad in the shoulders to have a phthisical constitution; the only visible weakness was the excessive brightness of the colour in his cheeks and from time to time a nervous jerking of the limbs.

Verdi, usually so discreet in bestowing his attention upon others, could not take his eyes from Fischböck's face.

He may have been drawn by the peculiar fairness of the hair that in the father, as in the child, had the same gold tones, for whether it was the Roman burger in him yielding to the charm of the glowing-haired barbarian, or the blood of his own long-bearded forefathers calling to him, the Maestro was always attracted to blonde people. But it was not only the colouring that drew his eyes to this stranger, the face was remarkable enough to hold the attention of any observer.

In the moment when we look in the face of a stranger a message is telegraphed to us in cipher concerning our former relation to those features, but whatever the clearer light of the future may make possible, we are as yet unable to read the cipher.

At first sight Fischböck's face seemed to be that of a young schoolmaster, for there was a touch of pedantic sharpness in the clearly defined and rather small features. Strangely deep lines were drawn between those sharpened features, and seemed to betoken degeneracy rather than physical infirmity, and made it difficult to believe that the man had really spent his six and twenty years in the straitest and narrowest of circumstances. This face fell into two unharmonious divisions, which contradicted and strove with each other. The eyes and the high, powerful, sharply sloping forehead were those of a great man, but the mouth and chin were pinched and contemptuous, and their repellent harshness seemed to negative the nobility of the brow. There was no balance in that face, but only opposition. And yet, unmistakably arrogant as Fischböck's look was, it nevertheless awakened the sympathy of the Maestro, who, since his own inner life had become so unrestful, was repelled by anything approaching self-complacency in others.

On the forehead and eyes of the German there lay something more than a self-aware and possibly justifiable pride. A light burned there, not a figurative but an actual light plain to be seen—inward, consuming and irradiating. It might indeed be disease that burned there, and gripped the Maestro's heart with the same pity that he had felt in the house of the theatre porter from La Fenice when the cripple had improvised his songs of love and sorrow.

Absorbed in its play, the child approached Verdi. A pink, pointed shell fell out of his hand and rolled in front of the Maestro, and the boy running forward to grasp it stumbled over Verdi's foot which lay outstretched before him in square-toed country shoes that vexed Peppina so sorely by their lack of elegance.

Verdi raised the child, whose mouth was already drooping woefully, and

soothed him with a phrase chosen with droll effect from the ten German words he knew. The parents looked on, pleased and surprised.

Perhaps it was the German phrase, perhaps the voice or the charming mildness of the wrinkling eyes—the old man's angel smile as Romilda Pantaleoni, the singer, had called it—or it may have been the kindness which the words expressed that created so friendly an atmosphere, as the young wife hurried forward to take the child from the stranger's hands. But the Maestro had drawn the child to him and was repeating his curious phrase:

"Now is good ! Now is good !"

Then he spoke to the mother in French, praising the child, and when both parents had thanked the stranger, Fischböck said in quick, ready Italian,

"You speak German ? That is rare in Italy."

"Oh no ! I have picked up a word or two in my travels, that's all. But you speak Italian so easily, Herr, that I needn't produce my few remaining German words."

"Then you know Germany ?"

"Know it ? No, I can't say that. I've been a few days in Vienna, in Berlin, in Dresden and Cologne, but Germany is big and that is very little."

The conversation came to a standstill, but Fischböck's eyes hung on those of the stranger. He had never seen a portrait of Verdi, but fame and wide repute lend a mysterious dignity to a man's aspect that is felt wherever he may be. The Maestro saw that it was respect that kept the young man silent.

His experienced eye summed the strangers up and recognized that the burden of poverty lay on them, a burden from which he himself had not always been free. To draw them out further, he asked the young people whether they were passing through Italy or had come to live there.

Mathias Fischböck answered readily, as if he were glad to find a friend with whom to talk.

"We have been living for more than five years in Venice, ever since our marriage, so we are not one of those unsociable couples who only spend their honeymoon here."

"And the boy ? What is he going to grow up ? A German or an Italian ? Or have you not made up your minds yet ?"

"It makes little difference in this world and in these times. What I am resolved is, that, as long as I can, I will keep him from being spoiled by our hideous culture and education."

"I have no right to advise you, but I don't agree that it makes no difference. We must belong to some nation unless we are to lose all root and character; we must decide on which national lines we are to develop. Otherwise you get only a hotchpotch character."

Fischböck pulled a face, nervously.

"Nationality ? Our modern nationalism only emphasizes the defects of a race at the expense of its qualities. I see the hotchpotch everywhere, my dear sir, and the nationality nowhere."

"And why do you live in Venice ?"

"For several reasons. I belong to one of what are called the liberal professions and I am on that account obliged to live in a cheaper country than Germany And then, Venice is good for my health."

Verdi asked somewhat hesitatingly, with a glance at the young man's knee which was jerking uncontrollably,

"Are you ill ?"

Both the young musician and his wife hastened to answer at the same time, speaking hastily, as if there were something to be concealed:

"Ill ? No, not exactly. In fact, I feel as well as possible just now. No doctor has been able to find anything wrong with me. I am perfectly sound. My lungs are splendid, all the organs are splendid. It is only this cursed, senseless fever that keeps me down."

"A nervous fever, perhaps."

Agatha Fischböck took up this remark of the Maestro eagerly, and said in a raised voice that seemed to draw the words in instead of breathing them out:

"The gentleman is right, Mathias. It is certainly a nervous fever that you have. Dr. Carvagno says the same."

Mathias waved aside his wife's words.

"It is the spirit of evil," he said, "which always tries to hinder him who seeks to discover truth."

The Maestro, who did not understand these words, asked again:

"You have still another reason for choosing to live in Venice?"

"I have. Venice is a place apart. It does not belong to our day."

"How does that help you?"

The pedantic look was replaced by one of fanatical excitement, and the young man's face wore a strangely mediæval air as he said with some bitterness:

"I must oppose this accursed century if I am to fulfil my task."

The Maestro looked serious. The general tendency to denounce the present which he saw everywhere seemed to him a sign of weakness and self-disgust. Although he himself was a singer of sorrow, it was the sorrow that he saw in the world around him of which he sang, not the abstract evil over which the philosopher mourns. All overstrained intensity jarred upon his dramatic sense, and his taste was offended by the turn of Fischböck's sentence although he did not see in what sense the words were used.

"Why do you quarrel with our century? It has brought mankind much that is good, and even valuable."

"What sort of value? I see none."

"You are a young man, Signor, and I am an old one. You have perhaps more education than I have. On the other hand, I have watched the century grow since its thirties. I still find it difficult to believe the astonishing changes that I have seen. My first journey by coach from Parma to Milan took a whole day. Now I can be in Paris in a couple of hours. My first work had to be done by the light of tallow candles, now electricity turns the night into day. When I wrote my first letter I had to wait weeks for the answer, to-day I can cable to the ends of the earth and get a reply the same day. You young people have never known anything else, and you are inclined to underestimate the gigantic benefits which the nineteenth century has conferred upon the world."

"I do not see that men are anywise benefited by all these technical advances."

"That is the way of the world, it is the curse of humanity that a man comes into the world naked and has to clothe himself with experience as best he can."

"Has not this damnable, so-called progress destroyed and murdered the soul of humanity?"

"Softly! softly! Souls were made before steam engines!"

"A poor exchange!"

"May I know your name?"

"Fischböck."

"Ah, that's not easy to say. Listen, Herr Fischböck. When in my youth I was cutting myself free from the parson's leading strings, the word of the moment—a legacy from the French Revolution—was 'Reason.' That word to-day wags a venerable beard. In the papers and magazines now the word is 'Spirit.' You may believe me, this spirit will grow a beard also."

"But you will admit that art to-day lies at the point of death."

"In what way?"

"There is no longer such a thing left in any European country."

"If I may venture an opinion upon literature, Manzoni, who died only a few years ago, wrote with a truly Homeric pen, and Victor Hugo is still alive. Zola and Tolstoy are writing book after book. These are only a few names that occur to me, for I am not really a great reader."

"Zola and Tolstoy are critical writers and not true creators."

"Perhaps, Herr Fischböck, you have more insight into these matters than I. But one thing you must admit—music in this century has risen to the summits."

The Maestro said this as if it were the indisputable opinion of the whole world and one that could not be challenged. He looked down quietly at the floor. The word music excited Fischböck beyond measure. He sprang up. His wife looked helplessly on as if she were saying: "Now the devil's let loose." He came nearer the Maestro.

"Music? Who has risen to the summits in music?"

With the tense attention of a hunter Fischböck waited to fall upon the answer.

Verdi, after an appreciable pause, said in a low voice, as if it cost him a struggle:

"Beethoven and Wagner."

At these words the gothic, monkish face of Fischböck changed to a hideous Asiatic mask. He laughed wildly, pressed his hand over his beating heart and paced up and down before the sun-streaked lagoon as if he would summon help from somewhere to express his thoughts. Then he collected himself and advanced towards the Maestro, who without raising his eyes shrank a little aside, upon which Fischböck stood back respectfully. Then he gave tongue:

"Beethoven and Wagner! These are the very heroes who have murdered music."

"Since you seem to be a musician yourself, Herr Fischböck, you must explain what you mean to me."

Mathias Fischböck's eyes were fixed, his lips moved wordlessly, silently trying and rejecting his formulas. Raising his hand he clawed at the air as though to press some elusive spirit into his service. Then in a laboured voice, as if he were uttering his most secret, long-pondered and inextinguishable beliefs he began:

"Music was once pure, the spirit of life on earth, lonely and poised in her orbit like a star. Her clear, unpremeditated song flowed in obedience to its own laws, for the harmony was but a piece of the material that the spirit of man, God the builder, used.

"Then came humanism and with it the insolent Ego, the self-regarding being ruled only by its own unresting desires. Shorn of its godhead, song was rent asunder. No longer flowing in the endless circle of law, it fell apart into two meagre systems: melody and bass. That which was called melody was no longer melody but an empty, ear-tickling jodelling in the easy intervals which pleased that inferior, law-despising, pleasure-seeking race.

"Satan ruled the bass. True voice he had none save only the roaring of beasts and bestial instincts, and rhythm—the pure principle of evil. At first men accepted gratification as primordial and drank in the music gladly. But when the eighteenth century came to an end, the arch fiend Beethoven appeared and music was degraded to serve his personality—his vanity, pride, brutality and mediocrity. And these incantations, this shameless charming of nerve and sense called itself 'Soul'! Thenceforward every concert room in the world became a taproom where the pleasure-loving swilled 'Soul'—this depraved, infected music with its psychic content . . ."

The Maestro, to whom this harangue sounded monstrous and unintelligible, was nevertheless moved by something in it, he could not tell what. He tried to give the younger man clearly to understand his opinion of the blasphemies he had uttered.

"Like all Germans, you hate and despise the Italian spirit in music out of a natural antagonism. I am not, God knows, a musical historian like the learned Fétis, but this much I understand at least, that you date the downfall of music from the appearance of the monody, the Aria. Here on Italian soil, music was delivered from the thrall of the church and in the *a-capella* manner we have the fruit which ripened out of the Gregorian mode. (For example, I consider Palestrina the greatest musician that ever lived.) Music was set free, and, as Madrigal perished and the first Recitative, the first Aria rang out, she was born again. Since these days there is no other music but Aria, opera music, music with a

poetic content. You do not believe in nationality—but your hatred of modern music is an inborn national hatred. Yes, we of Italy have produced melody—the Aria, the opera melody with its essentially unmusical accompaniments, its merely rhythmic bass—and it is one of the achievements of our national history to have thus conquered the influence of the North. It may be, as you say, that opera is a catastrophe. Perhaps so ! But for something like three hundred years there has been no music but some form of opera. No doubt, opera is a profane, a cheerful, a popular, an emotional form. Will it ever, as you æsthetics hold, be superseded by an abstract, absolute form ? No ! The thing's impossible. If I understand you rightly, you hate Beethoven as much as you hate opera. His symphonies are only wordless opera, melodrama in musical phrases. In the ninth he must even wind up with a finale outright. Pah ! Why all this argument ? You are exciting yourself about nothing. We Italians are poor simple natives, and you German gentlemen are too clever, far too clever."

Mathias Fischböck gazed with intense astonishment at this old man in his great Borsolino hat, his dark-brown overcoat and square-toed country-made shoes, who looked so much more like a farmer than an artist of any sort.

"You are a musician, sir ?"

"God forbid ! I am a farmer, or if you drive me to it, a landowner ! In my youth I meddled a little with music,—a few songs."

"But you have an incredible knowldge of it . . ."

"Oh, the knowledge is on your side, Herr Fischböck ! There is one thing you must explain to me still. I have always heard that Richard Wagner is the mighty deliverer, the regenerator of music who has delivered her out of the clutches of the Rossini, Meyerbeer and Verdi gang, and led her to drink at his fountain of polyphony."

Fischböck burst out again,

"Oh ! Oh ! Polyphony ! Where is it ? There is nothing but an abominable, diabolical striving after meretricious effects. He the Deliverer ! He is the Destroyer of music ! All his methods are unclean. He is the arch idol of the believers in self-gratification."

And after a pause he added:

"The last of the musicians were Buxtehude and Bach."

"A hard saying and much ante-dated."

The unnaturally flushed face of the young German was turned suddenly upon the Maestro.

"Sir, we have hardly known each other half an hour, and we are already discussing the deepest and most delicate subjects. We understand each other very well. And so you will not perhaps take me for a madman, if I, a stranger of whom you know nothing, should say to you that I myself have succeeded, and will still further succeed . . ."

Such naïve earnestness glowed now in the worn young face that all the Maestro's sarcasm was lost in a profound wonder at this man's fire.

Fischböck fixed his sea-grey gaze far out on the lagoon.

"Believe me, my dear Herr . . . Herr . . ."

"Carrara, call me Carrara."

"Yes, Herr Carrara, I have almost succeeded already."

"In what ?"

The German straightened himself proudly to throw out his challenge to the world.

"In setting music upon a new, pure, hitherto unknown foundation. More than that no man can say."

Verdi's features locked grimly, and Fischböck seeing it added:

"Herr Carrara ! I have nothing against the Italians more than against the Germans. The Italians with their straightforward simplicity are even the better of the two. But, believe me, it is finished, finished ! I am bringing that which must come. It is a hard thing to do. Why was I born in this accursed time with its Wagner-piping ? I am still unknown. God be thanked, I have kept

myself free from vanity. But already I have almost recovered it—the forgotten, the new-born melody, impersonal and unspoiled."

A spasm, of his fever perhaps, shook the young man. The young wife who sat silent and attentive threw a quick look at him which was an enigma to the Maestro. Fischböck—his pinched lips twitching—seized the hand of the unknown man who was suddenly drawn to him with the keen sympathy that comes to us in moments of emotional release.

In the fanatical young face glowing with such self-confidence, such certanty of power as he himself rarely felt, Verdi saw that the man was driven by the lash of a harder, more unsparing devil than that of the devil of doubt which pursued himself. And he was filled with an overmastering tenderness for the poor, sick, nameless boy.

Once more, as by Mario's song, he was moved to say, "This is genius." And though in this case the thought was unsupported by any proof, the Maestro could not put it away. A paternal, self-sacrificing emotion filled him.

Fischböck seemed to wish to soften the crudeness of his ebullition.

"Do not set me down as a braggart, Herr Carrara, or for one of those vain fools whom one meets everywhere, full of theories for the reformation of art. I will not be called a reformer at any price. No ! No ! I am thinking of deeper things. I hate the formless modern ideas. I am not free from them myself. But they must be burnt out, and most of all from me. I want to free art from its modern formlessness, its psychic, subjective irresponsibility. I am a conservative. We have to strive to recover our understanding of that which was self-evident in other days. We have run to seed. Our musical enthusiasts are ignorant of the simplest things. Do you believe, for instance, that there is one of our famous opera composers who could even write a passable fugue ?"

The last explosion alienated the Maestro's sympathy for a moment. Then an idea occurred to him which seemed so amusing that the taunt ceased to ruffle him.

Verdi was accustomed to carry with him a green note-book which he used, not as a diary, but for working out musical problems. He was in the habit of writing a fugue in it every day. When a book was filled he tore it up, for he preferred the worst inspiration to the best invention, and looked on his fugue writing merely as practice, as an oiling of his musical mechanism, perhaps as an ironical, self-imposed penance for his earlier operatic errors. In these exercise books, which are unfortunately lost for ever, astonishing things might have been found. For in any chance noise, the call of an ice-cream vendor or a boatman, the harvester's or vintage gatherer's shout, the crying of a child or the intonation of a passing voice, he would find the theme for his fugue.

Once—this story is related by Professor Pizzi—he astonished his neighbours on the Senatorial bench, his friend Piroli and the great Quintino Sella, by filling four sheets of such a notebook with a complicated double-fugue on the theme of a tumultuous parliamentary debate. This historic and authentic document is still preserved in the possession of the Piroli family.

One would certainly be hotly contradicted by most students of music if one were to call the creator of Rigoletto the greatest composer of his time. But the fastest he, at least, was. Any inner or external impression was recorded almost instantaneously on the music paper. It was one of the Maestro's small vanities to astonish people now and then with this facility of his, by seizing the note of any passing incident and nailing it in his wild script to the pages of the green notebook. The secret of his art was his freedom from all premeditation, afterthought or subtlety.

Fischböck's sneering remark nettled him. His national pride, too, was stung. He would show the German that, Italian as he was—and that he was an Italian was all the other knew about him—he could turn out something more than a simple unison.

He pulled out the notebook slowly, looking round him for a subject.

"Herr Fischböck," he said, "I am only a bungling Italian. You say nobody

nowadays knows how to write a fugue. Well, I am only an amateur, and, by your leave, I will not attempt a fugue, but only a little fugato."

Turning back the notebook carefully so that the other pages should not betray him, he pulled out the pencil.

"You hear those chlidren in the little sailing boat? The girls' voices! That's quite a good theme: F sharp major. Six sharps. You see! That's it!"

In seven minutes two pages of the notebook were filled with rapidly written notes. Firmly and clearly the voice part rose above the subdued bass, the whole duly and harmoniously welded, as if by magic, into a profuse but artistically handled whole.

Fischböck struck his forehead.

"That's unheard of! It's marvellous! I've never seen such a thing! And you pretend, Herr Carrara, that you are no musician."

"In the name of God, Signor! A musician? No, not I! About half a century ago I knocked bashfully at the doors of the Conservatorium of Milan, but they said I had no talent and turned me out. I'm grateful to them now. What horrible heights of erudition might I not have reached! So I remained a lover of music and became a farmer. A trifle of practice, perhaps, but basta! If you ever go back to your own country, you can tell your people that the Italians are by way of being musical rascals, but they don't take their rejection by the Conservatorium of Counterpoint too much to heart."

Fischböck, fascinated and deeply impressed by the personality of the Maestro, wrung his hand.

"Herr Carrara, I don't mean to be impertinent; Agatha says I lash out at everybody. I know myself that I have an unsympathetic manner, but you are the first man for a long time who has made me regret it. I am extraordinarily impressed, and I beg of you to come and see me or let me come to you. I am persuaded, although you are so much older than I, that you are the man to understand me. There are a great many things I should like to speak to you about. I know that I was very rude just now."

The Maestro hesitated a moment over his answer. He knew by long experience that it was not wise to burden himself with new friends. He was too old not to distrust every fresh approach. What would it bring him? Worries, responsibilities, annoyance, and sooner or later, another melancholy rupture. He had always been only too ready to respond to the calls that were made upon his age and position. And the ungrateful callousness of youth was painful to him.

Agatha Fischböck noticed his hesitation. She hung on his lips with such anxiety, it seemed as if his answer were her last hope. In her suspense an unconscious smile parted her lips and this smile decided him.

"Good, I will come and see you."

"When? To-day? Make it to-day!"

"This evening. Or to-morrow. Give me your address."

Before he shook hands with his new acquaintances the Maestro gave the child a long look and said:

"And you must be there, too."

With quick, cheerful steps he walked to the della Croce Embankment, where he took a boat. He did not sit down on the worn seat, but stood all the way. He could not tell whence came the voices that were holding converse in his mind:

"How comic they all are with their world-shattering Ego. What's the use of all this talk of art and such-like? We spout absurdities and neglect the business of life. That man's Ego will destroy him, and his poor little fair-haired wife will be sacrificed to his madness as well. Still, I am curious about those new objective ideas of art. Probably it will prove to be another important programme of totally unimportant music. But he interests me. He may be the coming man, who knows? The worst curse—I have known it for long—is all this eternal talk about 'Art.' It's all vanity and false ambition and emotion!

We want life, and life means war upon all chimerical vanities if it is to be real. Even Wagner! Poor devil! Nothing but error, and spectres everywhere; I must go and see him, though it's all so mad, I don't see what can come of it."

They passed a huge seagoing vessel, its red-painted convex side rising out of the water as it swung there unloaded.

The Maestro began to turn over in his mind the news he had received that morning about the hospital he was establishing at Villanova. That was a real thing. It offered new and interesting problems to occupy his mind. He had to decide various points about diet and expenses, to settle the daily ration of bread, macaroni paste, polenta, milk and wine that would be required and the number of beds; he had to estimate the probable cost of apparatus and instruments; there was a staff of servants to be thought of, economies, improvements and a thousand other things. While these thoughts occupied him he was no longer the great opera-composer, the world-famous musician, who had done nothing for ten years and was so harassed and pursued by doubts. His heart was no longer oppressed by thoughts of his unfruitful years, of rivalry or fame. He was an old, childless man to whom fortune and hard work had brought the power to do something for the good of others.

He made up his mind to call upon Dr. Carvagno and get some information about the management of the *Ospedale Civico*. Perhaps he could learn something that would be useful in his cottage hospital at Villanova.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOMENT

1

THE old and far-famed festival of the Venetian Carnival had fallen sadly away in latter years. True the historic procession from the Riva to the Piazza still took place, but it was no longer conducted with enthusiastic pride, and the floating flags of Carnival Tuesday now evoked only a dim and miserable spectre of past glories.

The great festival with its orgies, duels, intrigues, banquets and love-makings, its plays, masquerades and tableaux, its sudden outcries of love or hate, its dagger-thrusts and the splash of the backward-thrown body in the dark canal, this Carnival day that had once united and set at variance Venetians of every rank, had now dwindled into a mere annual market, accompanied by vulgar merry-making.

In the year 1883, thanks to the æsthetic enthusiasm of Count Balbi and his committee, all was to be changed. Not only had Margherita Dezorzi and two other distinguished actresses agreed to appear in the tableau together, several ladies of the nobility had also succumbed to the old Count's powers of persuasion.

Balbi, as was natural, had completely immersed himself in the task of purging the festival of the drunkenness, vice, and excesses which were due not only to its heathenish origin, but also to the licence allowed during the years of Church domination. He hoped to restore its former character which had been transformed, if not lost.

In the epoch that was coming to an end the city had been completely under the heels of the official burgherdom and the intellectuals. While the soulless modern machine was marching with rigid step over the altered face of the earth, these romantic burghers were still amusing themselves with painted or living tableaux of armed knights with scarred faces mounted on towering chargers, surrounded by wandering friars, and flowing banners—pictures which concealed the defects of their drawing or posture behind the clouds of smoke that rose from flaring torches. Meanwhile the canvases of Piloty in Munich

and the Delacroix School in Paris had been raising the dust of the artistic arena in sensational storms now long forgotten, and Makart in Vienna had been exhibiting his pretentious studies in "natural costume." But behind all this ostentatious art, as every schoolboy knows to-day, there was no solid reality, no life, but only a hollow decorative seductiveness.

Count Balbi, at bottom, belonged to this school. He saw in the Carnival an opportunity of gratifying his passion for decoration and sensation alike, and enterprisingly aimed at rivalling Makart.

The Orpheus group was decided upon, and after several sittings the costumes and masks were chosen. The practical good sense for which Margherita was valued in rehearsal at the theatre was called into service. She displayed no special interest in Italo, but the fact that she was willing to appear as his Eurydice was sufficient to nourish his languishing dreams.

His love for Bianca had been so exacting that no sacrifice or service of hers seemed too great to him, but his new love for the singer was so humble that he was content, although she hardly let her eyes rest on him and at best treated him as a colleague. He still spent a couple of unloverlike hours daily with Bianca, but he felt that this could not continue. In her compassionate presence his misery found vent in a half-genuine melancholy, in sighs and sudden bursts of tears. The chastest of wives are familiar with this exhibition of uneasiness in the presence of elemental things.

One morning, awakening to the new blessedness of knowing that Margherita was in the world, he determined to cut the knot forthwith. There were only two ways. The first, to tell Bianca all. But how could he do that? She was bearing him a child—he could not murder her. Besides, was this really his duty? Though his love for Bianca was certainly dead, the new flame was still closely sealed up in his heart, and the Dezorzi had hardly looked at him.

He chose the other way, the easier, ordinary way. Bianca, he knew, seldom went out. She had suffered for some time from a nervous dread of crowds and noisy streets. There was little danger, then, that she would meet him unexpectedly. This schoolboyish assurance of freedom gave his senses furlough in which to enjoy the opiate of his new happiness and await what event chance might bring. And so, setting aside his scruples, he went to Bianca on this morning with a tale about his brother Renzo who, he said, was sick in Rome. His father had asked him to go there, and he must set out at once. It might be ten days before he could return.

Bianca, once so mistrustful, so quick of apprehension, accepted this story without demur. She knew only one thing, that she must part from her lover, and for several days that parting benumbed her senses.

As he left the house Italo loathed himself, for he had never voluntarily lied before. He felt himself deflowered by this first major falsehood of his life. Still, he also had a feeling of relief such as he had not known for months. The thing had happened, the step was taken, and the tragedy must follow its inevitable course. He was free now to revel in his unsuspected worship of the genius, the presence, the face, the lovely figure of the singer.

An appointment over some matter concerning the Orpheus group took him the same day to the Dezorzi's home. Her mother, uncouth as ever, received him, and for half an hour he had to keep up a lame conversation with her in a tastelessly furnished room, deeply disappointed by Margherita's failure to appear. At last, as if she had just received the secret order, the mother got up and led him to Margherita. Every time he beheld her, his love seized him anew in such panic grip that he began to stammer like an idiot.

She was sitting at a writing-table bending over a calendar, upon which, for some reason he could not divine, she had ringed the fourteenth of February with red.

After a quick, careless scrap of greeting she said:

"The première of The Power of Destiny is on the twelfth. Have you asked your father to invite Maestro Verdi to the performance?"

"My father has promised to do what he can. I hope to have the answer soon."

"That's good."

The tall, slight figure rose from the writing-table.

"You must excuse me now. You see, I have to go to rehearsal."

Italo's face fell, and he turned pale with disappointment. She had hardly spoken a word to him, and now she was sending him away. Had he not come there to tell her all, to tell her that for her sake he had left the woman who loved him, and sinned against a great soul? His lips moved without producing a word, and he turned his eyes away. Margherita was touched.

"I am sorry that I must go. But you can come with me to the theatre. I am walking."

Obedient and delighted he walked beside her, almost bashfully, without a word. He could not explain his own embarrassment, but the effect she had upon him seemed to please the Dezorzi.

2

"My name is a very old and burdensome one. I torture myself when I have to speak it."—*From a letter of Verdi to Boito.*

Dr. Carvagno had taken the Maestro through the public hospital of Venice, which his untiring energy had transformed from its former provincial mediocrity into a great modern institution of the widest scope. Verdi, who had often looked at the dismal, ruinous wall of the hospital flanking the Canal del Mendicante, had been greatly astonished to find when he entered that it concealed a great park, modern offices and spacious sick wards.

Carvagno, anxious that this honoured and benevolent visitor should clearly understand all that he had done, took the Maestro through every room and went carefully into every question he raised, showed him the operating theatre, the servants' hall, the kitchens and sculleries. Verdi was intensely interested. He made notes of the subjects that specially concerned him, and mentally drafted the letters and instructions that he would send later in the day to the future Curator of his "Hospital for the Poor" in Villanova.

After an hour of strenuous inspection they sat in Dr. Carvagno's room, which looked over the lagoon, its large window framing the dark cypresses of the Venetian necropolis, the island graveyard of San Michele.

The Maestro was inquiring into the nature of Mathias Fischböck's illness and had already told the doctor the story of their midday encounter at Giudecca. Throwing the end of his cigar out of the window the doctor turned upon him the strained gaze of the shortsighted.

"I will not weary you, Signor Maestro, with professional details. In every science, and in ours most of all, words are misleading. The young German suffers from an unintermittent fever that has already lasted for a month, though the temperature has never risen to an extreme height. The origin of this fever is not clear. As far as our methods of examination show, I do not find either the lungs or any other organ seriously affected. Naturally I can make many conjectures, but none appears to me to be sufficiently proved. My colleagues would certainly stone me if they heard what I am going to say to you now—which is, that possibly the derangement of the bodily functions is caused by abnormal mental activity. In Fischböck it seems as if the whole life-current were pouring itself away in this feverish temperature. Frankly, I cannot diagnose the case with any certainty."

"And these young people are living in poverty?"

"I am not certain of that either. They have never allowed me to know what their circumstances are. I have visited them often, partly in the course of my duty and also because the man interests me. I am certain that they go hungry sometimes, but they give no information on the point, naturally, in case one

might try to smuggle food into the house. Money they would throw in one's face, for they have the pride of Spanish hidalgos. Were you recognized, Signor Maestro ?"

"No, I called myself Carrara and a farmer."

"I blush for the unprofessional opinions I have given you, Signor Maestro. I'm afraid I'm no proper doctor, but a mad sort of fellow who goes his own way. A proper doctor always knows the names of things and what he must prescribe. My trouble is that people's diseases affect me too strongly. It's unprofessional ! They fascinate me, carry me out of myself. I can't explain it, my dear Maestro, I have no head for theorizing but a passion seizes me, a black rage—oh, I'm drivelling !—making a fool of myself."

"On the contrary, my dear Carvagno, I understand you perfectly. You practise your art by inspiration. I understand."

A few minutes after Verdi took his leave.

Next afternoon the Maestro appeared, as he had promised, at Matthew Fischböck's home. This proved to be only a single poor but fairly large apartment divided into sleeping and sitting-rooms by a curtain. As soon as he entered Verdi was aware of a curious emotion for which he could not account to himself. The air of remoteness and purity that reigned in that room seized him and, for a single puzzled moment, carried him back to the time when, in his youth, he had sought out the youthful Wagner in Paris.

His emotion may have been due to this passing memory, a flash of thought that scarcely rose into consciousness, or it may, perhaps, have been caused by the fact that there lay before him a table spread for a meal with its unromantic kettle and a large dish of baker's cakes. He had not expected to be treated as a guest, and the sight of the table prepared for him in that slip of a room touched him keenly.

The whole place had, for him, an essentially foreign and unfamiliar character. It seemed to greet him like some strange, uncomprehended creature, strong and yet helpless, far from its native haunts. Every article in the room moved the Maestro thus—the white-covered table, the little piano spread with music and books, the old telescope in the corner, a perfectly useless heirloom that Fischböck took with him everywhere.

Frau Fischböck seemed to have a passion for covering and draping everything that could possibly be draped or covered, and these wrappings gave an old-maidish, even moribund air to the room.

A wave of pleasure rose in the Maestro's heart when little Hans immediately ran up to him, as if to an old friend. There was no hostility in that reception.

Mathias helped him off with his overcoat respectfully, while Agatha stood by with pleased eyes, and the boy, dragging up one of his pet playthings, began to explain its use to the visitor. The Maestro felt bitterly annoyed with himself for not having thought of bringing a present for him.

Though the room was warm, the young musician was wearing an overcoat, and noticing the Maestro's look of surprise, he began to apologize.

"I hope you won't mind my coat, Herr Carrara; I am always freezing, freezing ! Nothing warms me. You can imagine what it is like to work in that state, wearing one's hands away with rubbing. No matter ! The more friction the better the fire."

He stretched his arms, while an unnatural colour flushed his cheek.

The pseudo Herr Carrara shook his head.

"Why spend the winter here in the north, then ? Italy is full of places on which the spring is already bursting. Cheaper places than Venice, too."

"Oh, no, I couldn't live anywhere else. I am so well here. I shall never leave."

"They say Venice is a witch whose spells are peculiarly dangerous to musicians. One legend has it that music itself was begotten among these flood tides and fisherfolk. But your critical faculties and theories, Herr Fischböck, will keep the music of Venice from harming you."

"Oh, there are masses of bad music piled up in me, as in all our contemporaries, Herr Carrara. I feel the musical magnetism of this place strongly. I spend hours tramping the streets or staring bemused in the Grand Canal or over the lagoon. One is lulled continually, even on the mainland, by the rocking of the waves. Not the clear music of the stars, but the chaotic music of the sea reigns here. I can conquer it all the better for having it constantly before me. Mist and clouds, mingling and surging together, the ceaseless play of formlessness—water music ! Is not all that Wagner ? Ah, the old man knew what he was about when he came back here to live."

"I know too little about Wagner's music to criticize it, my dear Fischböck. But do you really owe so little to that master, that you can hate him so much ?"

The steam hissed suddenly from the tea-kettle, and Agatha Fischböck called them to table. Again the Maestro felt touched by the thought that those poor people had put themselves to expense on his account. But his welcome was so cordial and frank that he ate and drank heartily to conceal his scruples. Only the milk which was offered him he declined, lest he should be robbing little Hans.

His sympathy with these people, his sense of fatherly solicitude, became stronger as the meal proceeded, and by the time the end was reached an atmosphere of complete friendliness prevailed. The invalid seemed to throw off his restlessness; unconsciously the strong personality of Verdi was benefiting him. The young wife saw a new friend won in this distinguished, elderly man whose strong, kindly features inspired her with such confidence. She was still so young, in spite of all the cares and fears and vicissitudes that weighed her down. The presence of the guest lay on her like a soothing, caressing hand. That bearded face with the light in its eyes which, even in this narrow space, gazed into the distance, drew all the distress from her and filled her with quiet happiness. Like a child, Agatha laid down her burden and basked in the sun of his presence. Even more readily than Mathias she responded to the influence of this stranger, and her overflowing gratitude found vent in pressing him to eat again and again.

As Fischböck passed a light for his guest's cigar, he said:

"It's useless for you to deny it any longer, Herr Carrara, you are a musician. I have been reminded again and again of the way in which, without a moment for reflection, you put those children's voices on paper. I am not easily impressed, but that gave my pride a shock. Your wrist has a knack that the greatest of our celebrities might envy. And you don't write music in an amateur's hand."

"My dear Fischböck, that performance has nothing at all to do with music. It's sleight of hand, like another man's card-tricks, that's all. I'm a country squire, nothing else; don't let's waste time over me !"

"No, no, you write music."

"But why should you want to make me out to be a music scribbler when, according to you, they are all so contemptible ? However, I didn't come to you in order to talk about myself. There are a great many things I want to know about you."

"My story is soon told."

"How old are you ?"

"Six-and-twenty."

"Six-and-twenty," repeated the Maestro slowly, as if he were reading the figure a long way off. Fischböck's face had assumed the mediæval mask again. In filial tones he recounted his labours.

"Yes, twenty-six years ! But twenty-five of them were of no account. The true hour of my birth only came last winter."

The Maestro was recalling his own six-and-twentieth year: "I had just written *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio.* God, how crude and empty I was compared with this youngster." After a silence he said:

"I am questioning you like a magistrate, but still I should like to ask, where were you born ?"

"In Bitterfeld, a town in Central Germany."

"Bitter field! *Campo amaro!* Couldn't your forebears find a happier name than that for their town?"

"It was well named, my dear Herr Carrara. It was not sweet to me. My father, who has been dead for three years, was church organist there. The townspeople never knew what to make of him. In Germany every man of intelligence either becomes an eccentric or takes to drink. Sometimes both! My father's whole life was wrapped up in the writing of an historical work called 'Thuringian Civic Music and the Thirty Years War.' His townsmen were of no more interest to him than the sweepings of the road. Naturally, they persecuted him. As for me—well, you can imagine how little cause I have for homesickness. And my Agatha here—she made a mess of it, too. Instead of sharing the rosy Bitterfeldian paradise of some curate or government official's existence, she ran away with me. Curtain! Our biography is complete!"

Maestro Verdi knew nothing of the insupportable parvenu Philistinism that has developed since 1870. It was inconceivable to him how a man could speak with such abhorrence of his native country. The catastrophe that has overtaken the Germany of former days, the national self-hatred that has grown out of its essential incapacity for corporate national life, was incomprehensible to the Italian. For Italy, through all the tragic modern crises that have marked the rise of foreign influence and education, has still preserved a living and clearly-defined democracy—a possession of which the victorious wars of Bismarck gradually robbed Germany. But the Maestro was thinking of other things.

"Herr Fischböck," he said, "you must not take my paternal curiosity amiss if I ask you a personal question. Since all your relations with your home are broken off, how do you live?"

It was evident that the musician found it hard to answer. He attempted to counteract the heaviness of the theme by lightness of treatment.

"Oh, we get on all right. I have enough to scrape along on. I'm going to see about some pupils in a week or two, when I'm fit again. And then, Herr Carrara, Agatha's so clever, she makes wonderful things. . . ."

Agatha blushed and, taking her little boy's hand, disappeared into the other room. The Maestro looked after the silent girlish creature whose like he had not seen before. Did she leave them now because she was ashamed of working to earn money, because she wished to avoid compliment or merely in order that the men might be alone together? No sound came from behind the curtain; the far-too-serious child never seemed to laugh or prattle.

With almost reproachful energy Verdi turned to the young husband and father.

"Come, Herr Fischböck, you will allow me to say to you that you are a musician and, I am convinced, a very able one. Putting your critical theories aside, I feel sure that an artist of your talent and one with your insight into the music of the present day must certainly have a great future before him. There are so few creative natures. And the world is hungering as never before after music."

"This pleasure-loving world is certainly not hungering after my music."

"It must be given the chance. An opening must be found for your work in Germany."

Fischböck roused himself.

"In Germany! In the Germany of Wagner, Liszt and the public orchestras! In the Germany of the dry-as-dust academics? No, there is no opening for me there!'

"One might be found in Italy, if you were to produce the right sort of music."

For a moment the Maestro saw creeping into Mathias Fischböck's eyes the same look of hope and weakening purpose which he had already seen in the wretched Sassaroli's. But the temptation was immediately and harshly repulsed.

"I know myself too well. I do not write for the world of to-day."

"You are thinking of the future ?"

"It is all of equal indifference to me. In my composition I simply fulfil the law of music as a tree fulfils the law of nature. What the world will do with it, or refuse to do with it, is of no consequence to me."

"You say your times are a matter of indifference to you. But listen to me, my dear Fischböck. You have still, perhaps, half a century before you. Indifference will make life more and more difficult as time goes on."

"I do not fear that. I choose wisdom rather than folly."

"You Germans take a lofty attitude towards consequences. But I cannot conceive a musician who does not produce music. Music is not a philosophy or a dogma of absolute truth, otherwise that which is produced would not become obsolete so soon. More than any other art it expresses the reaction of humanity to a given period. It is an ecstatic form of satisfaction, like love. That is why the applause which music evokes is not an incontinence, as the moderns declare, but an essential part of the music itself. It has to be reckoned with from the first draft of the score. It is as impossible to conceive music without the public as politics without the masses."

"That is a statement which I must respectfully contest, Herr Carrara. It is one of the characteristic conceptions of our day in which effect counts for everything. But the cosmos goes on its way regardless of humanity—and so does the universe of music. Must there be human ears before music can exist ?"

The Maestro tried to think where he had heard this argument before. Then he remembered how the Marchese Gritti had stood before the bust of Bellini on Christmas Eve and said: "Young gentlemen all, what sort of music is that to which a listener is necessary ?" The old opera-goer's meaning was exactly the same as that of this young man.

Verdi turned the conversation from theoretical matters. Fischböck's lofty ideas had a foreign, unnatural ring to him. How could music be considered apart from the effect it produced ? Never, under any circumstances, would he admit that possibility.

"At any rate, you will allow me to be an ear for the present. I am eager, after all this, to hear some of your work."

Fischböck immediately began feverishly to explain the implications of his music.

"I hate the orchestra, Herr Carrara, both the old orchestra with its neighing *tutti* harmonies and, a hundredfold more, the sticky morasses of modern music. The antics of modern orchestral music, which are nothing but old harmonies chopped up and plastered upon an eternal unceasing tremolo, are the natural expression of the limitations of present-day humanity which have to be conquered.

"Nor can I write for voices. Opera has corrupted them. There remains to me—besides, perhaps, the string quartet—only the tempered instruments which speak not to the senses but to the spirit. See, here are some pieces."

Fischböck laid the manuscripts on the table. There were Toccatas, Chaconne, Passacaglias, and pages headed only "Piece," all filled with even, careful script and almost entirely free from signs or instructions for execution. Individual titles there were none, the pieces were merely numbered. The indications of *tempo* were limited to the briefest statement and a metronome figure.

The look of the pages was itself a war cry—an angry challenge to all frivolous forms. Verdi, the champion of the living note, did not feel inclined to dive into this sea of musical notation. He begged Fischböck to play him one of the pieces.

Stiff and angular, the German sat down at the piano and began the rendering.

At the second bar Verdi set the young man down as a lunatic, at the tenth, as a humbug; by the thirtieth he was convinced that this atrocious creation must be the result of the mysterious malady which had undermined the young man's powers; but by the end he was asking himself whether it was because his own

ears were already stopped by age that he could distinguish nothing in the work beyond a fortuitous medley of notes struck at random on the piano.

Each of the parts seemed to go its own way as if they were scraps from separate compositions, till at intervals they were drawn together with a strongly marked accent into a sort of harsh concord that clanged in the ears. The bass stumbled on like the never-halting trampling of exhausted feet. Soon the key was lost again, dominant and ground tones seemed to be banished from the composition by order of the police, leaving the strange, unpleasing intervals in uninterrupted possession.

Was this, indeed, the work of a disordered brain ravaged by insidious disease, or was it meant, of set purpose, to shock and assault ears which, like the Maestro's, were deaf to the new sound ? As the playing ceased, Verdi found no trace of annoyance in his mind. The absurdity of the man, the pure intensity with which he defended his absurdity, the hopelessness of the whole business, roused only an ever-growing pity. And this pity exacted from him an undeserved and futile leniency. The Maestro kept a long silence before he gave his opinion:

"You must have known beforehand, Herr Fischböck, that for a man of my age this music of yours must be unintelligible. And since I take you for a sincere and honest man the blame for that must fall on me. Let us admit it—I am not only old, but old-fashioned. There are, perhaps, those to-day, or there may be when your work has been given a hearing, to whom your music can speak. But I, at least, have not the faintest hope of understanding it!"

"Herr Carrara, it is not to be expected that you should be able, at the first onset, to master my music. To begin with, you must rid your mind of all your preconceptions about tune."

"That is a state I should find it hard to reach."

"But think for a moment how far, in the course of the centuries, men's ideas have already changed on the subject."

"That is true. Music which we now dismiss as out-of-date was in my youth hissed down as newfangled, earsplitting noise."

"There, you see ! And in a short time longer this music of mine, which only horrifies you to-day, will explain itself in your ears. It is only that I have been born too soon."

"And I must die before long. My tale of years is nearly told. After my death the world will see many things. My hope for you is that you may live to be understood."

"Won't you look through the music, Herr Carrara; your eyes must tell you that it is good."

"Assuredly. It is wonderfully clear *to look at*. If it depended on that I should be your heartiest supporter."

"Believe me, Herr Carrara, when you begin, even provisionally, to recognize them, you will see that mine are true melodies."

The crazy self-confidence of these words arrested the Maestro.

"Melodies ?" he queried, and paused.

Fischböck's lips were compressed again into a straight line.

"I have no fears. Once you know more of me, the new melody will come to you. We are all of us corrupted."

"No doubt as an Italian I have only the limited conception of melody that belongs to my race and my time."

"What, then, do you call melody ?"

"It cannot be defined, at most only described. True melody, to my mind, is entirely subordinated to the nature and possibilities of the human voice. An instrument can only produce melody when it imitates human song. Thus, melody is based upon *singable* intervals and on our sense of tune, which must not be outraged. This is a rough and ready description, but theory is not my line."

"Sense of tune. But that, surely, varies ?"

"Unquestionably. Melody is the child of its generation. It does not hang

like Mahomet's coffin, in empty air. Neither in time nor in space has it an absolute existence."

"You admit, however. . . ."

"I admit that your music may one day, when mankind has developed the necessary musical sense, be intelligible. But it has nothing whatever to do with the human voice."

Fischböck bowed his head. The young rebel who had calmly cast out the gods of his generation and set himself unhesitatingly in their seat, now said in a voice so low and sad that the Maestro's last antagonism vanished:

"Oh, if only—if only there were even three or four people who understood what I am trying to do."

The face of his guest grew tender.

"As we grow older," he said, "we begin to try to understand, to seek simplicity. The artist has no need to choose solitude—nature herself has made him solitary. You, too, will learn that. And now, listen, my dear Fischböck. Let me take one or two of your pieces with me and study them. For, as I said, my ear and my taste and myself are all out of date. I am not an art critic; a facile first impression is not enough for me."

Fischböck chose out what seemed to him the most intelligible manuscripts. He felt that more might depend on this country gentleman's opinion than he could foresee, and before parting with the manuscript the musician was careful to ascertain that he had a copy of them all.

The Maestro looked round the room, whose atmosphere was neither Italian nor cosmopolitan but breathed a sort of provincial narrowness and penury. He looked at the unyouthful lines and burning eyes of the fair pedantic face of this man who—out of a half-crazed brain and a fevered frame, out of genius and pride, out of whatsoever material he could find—lived only to create the thing that possessed him.

Impressed, in spite of his judgment and his prepossessions, Verdi asked himself:

"Must not a man with such belief in himself, a man of such lofty mind who, hating the present, labours for the unknown and unseen, must not such a man have some greatness in him ?"

The mother and child came from behind the curtain. As he took leave of her the Maestro felt Agatha's hand cling to his as if it begged for a promise that, in spite of the wildness of his dreams, he would befriend her sick husband whose life was threatened by the fire of genius as well as that of fever. She was at her wits' end ! Would this stranger help her ?

The Maestro's hand gave her a promise that included not the sick man only but the lovely sad-mannered child, who led so unchildlike a life between the exaltation of his father and the dumb melancholy of his mother.

What did the great park at Saint Agatha, with its long alleys, its lawns, its thickets and clearings lack but the voice and footfalls of a child ? The branches of the great tree were all too silent and deserted.

3

"O, come not nigh the urn
Where my poor dust is lying;
My sorrow and my sighing
To quiet dust let turn.

With no belettered stone
Upon the silence breaking,
Disturb the long, unwaking
Sleep that my shade has won."

After Jacopo Vitorelli's poem, "Non accostar all'urna." Set to music by Verdi in 1838.

Drearily, with benumbed senses, the Maestro sat that evening before the manuscript of King Lear.

How remote music seemed from him ! He could hardly believe that he had once written the rhythms and harmonies which now danced and sang nightly through the lighted theatre. Who was that Verdi ? He knew nothing of him. A stranger wholly incomprehensible to him. How wise a choice the good lawyer-like name Carrara had been—he felt that he was Carrara now and no longer Verdi. He had escaped from Genoa, from Milan, from all the places where he was known, where familiar faces and voices closed round him, escaped to this strange town, to accomplish the impossible, to make one last effort, to be alone with himself and with his own thoughts. Now, in spite of all his struggles, all his self-control, the truth confronted him; "It is the end !" Now and then a fleeting hope might visit him, a melodious phrase come to him, the happy blending of a few notes. But it was only an echo—the vestige of a forgotten habit. All self-delusion was at an end. The power was no longer there. How it has astonished him now, like any layman, to think that there were people in the world who, in an effortless flow of imagination, could create in an hour or two pictures that lived and moved through the world in a real and independent existence of their own. The ban had fallen on him now for ever, no matter how many years might remain to him.

The Maestro sprang up and began his nightly marching up and down the room. "And now—now, when I have come so far, when I have thrown off so many shackles, felt and learnt so many things—now I must lay it all aside ! It is intolerable ! I am alive still. All my powers and energies as sound as those of a man of thirty. Why, in the devil's name, must I sacrifice it all and shrink into my shell to die ? I am no longer only the popular opera composer and song writer. I could show them—ah, I could show them—that I am strong enough, unyielding enough still to do new, unheard-of things ! And now, it is all over."

Once the Maestro came to a standstill before the locked cabinet; then, tearing himself away, he resumed his pacing to and fro again. Fischböck's manuscript lay there somewhere, but he had determined not to look at it. He meant to help the boy in any case, but that extravagant stuff would only add to his doubts and annoyance.

He could not put the young pair and the child out of his mind. The picture of that poor room with its white-covered table and its pinched air of poverty rose before him. He saw the hectic, sharpened features, and heard the choppy, legato-scorning playing of this man, who put aside the whole art of his day and recognized no predecessor but Bach.

Impatient criticisms of Fischböck's music crowded into the Maestro's mind. Why did he give mediæval titles like Toccata and Passacaglia to his music ? Were not the furious strictures of the ascetic in reality only a repetition of the satirical diatribes of the Senator against the present age ?

The Germans, he thought, seemed to be an incurably literary nation, a nation of aspiring schoolboys, priding themselves upon their ability to make some recondite allusion. Goethe's Faust, which he had read only a few weeks before, came into the Maestro's mind. In all its cleverness was there a trace of feeling ? None. It was full of scientific terminology and far-fetched conceits. What an absurdity to call such a book Folkpoetry ! And in spite of his hatred of his own people Fischböck was a German through and through.

The Maestro recalled Agatha's hand-clasp—a hard, work-roughened hand. Yes, that plain, insignificant little creature was the true heroine of this tragedy. With all her quietness and silence Agatha was a more real and living being than Fischböck. Verdi could almost hear her light, rather shrill voice actually in his ears. He knew the fate of one who shared the life of a monomaniac—working far into the night, subduing all her own inclinations, thinking only of him who had no eyes for her whom he saw continually. Agatha was such a one as in his vision of a few moments before he had seen himself ready to become.

When he thought of the boy his self-reproach at having forgotten to take him a toy returned. Suddenly he recalled his wandering thoughts: he must not become censorious in his old age. He was back here now, and the campaign must be carried on. Again he stared at the music and tried to transport himself to the wild heath where the storm was beating round King Lear. But he hated the notes of the storm as they ran from his fingers. They were only the reflection of old storms in Corsaro, Rigoletto, and Aroldo. That would not do.

He laid his head on his arm. A faintness spread through all his limbs. The Maestro knew that there was no help for this feeling of bruised and broken weariness. Often he had to endure it a whole night long, for his sleep, as age approached, became more interrupted. He often lay half awake while there passed in a painful review before him the many experiences that crowd the memory of a man of sixty-nine—like a stream that carried him far out from the shore of present reality. His weariness seemed to be only the gap in the dyke through which this stream poured in wild confusion, overwhelming his senses and his will. Almost too weak and helpless to stand, he knew that when this inner enemy overpowered him he could do nothing but turn out the lights and lie down as he was, in his clothes, upon the sofa.

In the darkened room the light of the gas-lamps from the Riva, from the bridges and boats, shone into the room and lay in lines and lozenges upon the carpet and the furniture.

The condition into which the Maestro fell was not one of dream. He did not lose consciousness for a moment nor lose sight of the room except when he closed his eyes.

Independently, as if produced by some other agency than his own, the past scenes moved across a vague stage, and he himself moved there also, acting as once in reality he had acted. He called this state "remembering," although he knew that he did not call up the recollections, but that something unknown caused his former life to pass before him. In the first scene that was staged in the room he was young and sat with two men in an inn garden at Milan, which had been popular during the thirties and forties. The man with the heavy good-natured, pleasure-worn face was the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli, the most powerful personage in the Scala of Milan and in the Imperial Opera House near the Kärntnertor of Vienna.

The other man was the poet and librettist Solera, who had written the text of Verdi's earliest opera, *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio.* Solera sat facing the Maestro—a broad-shouldered, none too trustworthy giant and an unmistakable bully, on whose bearded Mongolian face the monocle with its ribbon made an absurd contrast. There were wild stories told of Solera. As a boy the nomad escaped from the Theresianum* of Vienna, and became, in amazing succession, versifier, journalist, spy, perjurer, political libertine, opera composer, plagiarist, croupier, steward to the Spanish Bourbons, and confidential adviser to the Khedive in Cairo. His adventurous career was identical to a hair with that of the Abbate Lorenzo da Ponte in Mozart's opera, who meets the same fate as that which overtook Solera in New York.

While the Maestro was watching Solera drink a glass of honey-coloured wine, the recollection came to him of how this gifted poet and corrupter of youth had vanished out of his own life. A few years after this meeting, and after writing the text of Nabucco, he disappeared so completely that he could not be found to receive the proceeds of the opera. Still later he returned to Italy so morally bankrupt, so impudent a beggar, and so intolerable a nuisance, that Verdi would have nothing more to do with him.

Now, however, in the sunlit inn of this mysterious stage, Solera was talking at great length with the Maestro, and Merelli grunting out his views dubiously. While at the same time the sound of the nightly promenade on the Riva floated to him through the window, Verdi felt himself growing weary and melancholy

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* A reformatory institution named after Maria Theresa. (*Tr.*)

as he blinked in the dazzling sunlight that burnt on bottles and glasses on the table that stood in the garden.

This fragmentary, meaningless picture quickly passed and was followed by others as incomplete and inconsequent, and no less clear and distinct.

He saw himself in his little house in the Porta Ticinese of Milan. He was looking in a glass and the pale, black-bearded face reflected there was almost strange to him now.

It was very curious that, though his memory was not very good now, in these scenes he could see all the furniture, even the clocks of those three rooms, that he had forgotten for forty-four years.

He did not dream it, he remembered.

Suddenly a young woman stood before him. It was not his indulgent Peppina, who had so quickly laid aside the charms of the great *Diva* and for so many years now had been his patient, ponderous housewife. It was not Teresina Stolz, his Aïda, the rustic Bohemian with her warm embraces and strangely cold speech. It was another woman, another companion and another joy.

For many, many years now he had not thought of Margherita Barezzi, the wife who had shared the restless years of his early manhood. He saw her again, the slender figure that in a few months had shed its Busseto provincialism—he saw the curled dark hair, the shadowed face, the eyes with their charming lashes, the dainty clothes, the delicate, lovely foot. He did not hear her speak, her voice was an inward one. But he said "Margherita," and said it not only on that dim, illusory stage where he stood in youth again—he said it as he lay on the hotel sofa, a grey-bearded, worn-out man.

Then, in the long-forgotten room, he took a pair of golden bracelets from the table and gave them to her with a lover's look. More in protest against his carefulness than out of real need she had pawned the ornaments to meet the rent that had fallen due. The circlets jingled as she placed them again on her arm, and clearly as in reality he felt upon his mouth the breath of a strange, forgotten kiss, which ran through all his being like some subtle drug.

Outside the foghorn of a steamer droned, and gusts of laughter rose and fell.

The Maestro could not grasp the knowledge that this kiss was an imperishable experience—that it was, actually and without hyperbole, part of his real and present life. He was not ready to receive the super-rational consciousness that our earthly existence is not a fixed state but a passing away from all that we have loved, even from the self which we have loved, and that, nightly, we take leave not only of our companions but of our own personal being, that every moment of our earthly life is a ghostly phantasmagoria.

His thoughts turned to death. To death also changed the pictures.

There stood now in the room before him the two cribs in which his fevered children lay. The young mother, spent with sleepless nights, moved ceaselessly from the kitchen into the room, from the room into the kitchen. How should she rest? The sleepy maid out there had enough to do. He saw Margherita bringing water, warming it, pouring it into a basin and wringing out cloths—preparing the children's food. His clumsy hands could do but little to relieve her.

Bitter as poverty might be, he saw again and felt across the uncounted years, the pride and joy of the mother in her unquestioning, willing labour. And he felt, too, that in the bond of sorrow that united that household there lay for him an elemental, eternally ordained blessedness, the clearest flame that lights the path of man, beside which all his fame and all his joy in art were but as the torches that flare through shipwreck.

And what of her, the mother whose days were filled with a hundred cares and disappointments and sadnesses, who had to live so sparely, cut off from the luxury, the fashion, the society that charmed richer women? For him there was work and ambition and fleeting hope. But her days were darkened by the discontent of an impatient beginner to whom success came too slowly and

failure too often, by lonely hours and a hundred querulous complaints. In his phantasy the greatness of her sacrifice moved him, and he stretched out his arms to embrace her.

His three-year-old baby girl, lying there, began to cry with the long, wailing cry of suffering animals and children who have travelled so short a way out of the unblest void of night. Margherita ran to her, soothing, and singing to the child in her own deadly weariness.

But the boy by whose bed he himself was sitting did not cry. He loved his Icilio as the simple poor love their first-born. The boy breathed in short, quick gasps, his little fists beating the coverlet of the bed, and as the Maestro watched, his heart—the heart both of the young musician and of the old man on the sofa—beat in time to the boy's fevered pulse.

Suddenly the events of the day mingled with his vision, and for a moment the Maestro did not know whether it was his own son or little Hans Fischböck at whom he was gazing.

Then he had to watch with helpless horror while the child raised itself in the bed as if to escape from its agony by flight. He had to watch the flush fade and hear the panting breath fail as the boy stretched himself back unnaturally on the bed. With all his strength he tried to stem the recollection of that dreadful moment in which his child drew its last rattling breath.

The Maestro returned to himself and to the present moment in a choking spasm. Some sailors were singing outside and from somewhere a beam of light strayed slowly over the wall. He made a vain attempt to stand up, the hidden life that never quite releases us still held him in mysterious chains. With all his strength he tried to escape the pictures that followed, pictures of the dying mother, the wide-opened door, the coffins, the undertaker's men with their dusty shoes, wiping their mouths, and of the rain-sodden churchyard.

Then, as Margherita Barezzi stood again before him in a strangely modern and dainty summer dress he ceased the struggle. For several minutes he slept and fell into a dream, as if the dead could move more freely there than in the waking recollection.

He came down the steps of the house with Margherita and they walked together through sunlit streets until they came to the grass-covered bastions of Milan Castle. Margherita went so fast that he, the ageing man, could not keep up with her and went always a step behind.

With light footfalls she passed out of the dream Lombardy across a Japanese bridge into a dream Venice, and without astonishment he followed her. On the Piazza she stopped to buy flowers of an old woman, a spray of mimosa from which she broke a few stalks as she walked on. She seemed to know this strangely transformed Venice well; politely or roguishly she led the way, and left the Maestro to follow. The streets and lanes seemed particularly full of Venetian life which inexplicably gave him an impression of veiled horror and creeping dread. She came to the Calle larga Vendramin and the dreamer followed her reluctantly as far as the Palazzo. For the first time she halted and seemed to hesitate as if considering in which direction their way might lie, and she laughed in childish pleasure and satisfaction. She stood on tiptoe and, with a fresh burst of roguish laughter, threw three of her flowers over the wall. Then she became serious and looked round as if she was looking for a particular house. A little way further she found it and, nodding a careless goodbye as if to a mere acquaintance, she disappeared.

The Maestro awakened out of his brief dream. He had no time to wonder over its meaning, for immediately the pictured scenes of his recollection began to move before him again, and he himself moved in them.

He sat in the little room at the Scala that is reserved for authors. He had declined the usual seat of the composer between the first and second violins, whence to overlook the music of the less-important instruments, as was customary for the author of a work on its first performance. He realized how uncertain was the success of the evening and how poor the comic opera, "King

for a Day," really was. Yet this indifferent piece of work had cost him the most heroic effort of his life. He had not produced a work of art, perhaps, but he had stuck to his task like a hero through months of ghastly suffering, stupor and sickness which would have entirely crushed a weaker character. He was not proud of the opera—he cared nothing for it—but he was proud of his feat, and he did not want to let it prove a fiasco. But what did that audience of theatre-goers, foyer-gossips, pseudo-musicians and Radetsky officers care for him and his feat? Two acts were already over, and he had heard nothing. There had been no catastrophe, but very little applause. The battle was not yet lost.

Two or three men had come to him in the little room—his patron, Count Borromeo, and his friend, Passetti, the engineer, a slight acquaintance who had become interested in him during his threefold bereavement. Neither had said a word about the music, they had only discussed the singers at great length and gone back to their places at the first sound of the bell.

The old Maestro watched himself, the young composer, swallowing his angry resentment over the insincerity of these two half-hearted friends, while the last act proceeded.

There were three or four rather special songs and situations in it. They must go well. And the quartet wasn't at all bad; there were some quite good, tuneful bits, and the finale was better still.

He saw himself pacing this familiar room, where he had afterwards awaited the result of many first nights. As time passed he became more and more restless. He could restrain himself no longer, but ran down the wide stairs of the Scala, worn by many feet. Losing his way, he found himself in a storeroom full of theatre properties, and at last, perspiring, reached the stage.

There the full soul-shattering horror of a theatre catastrophe burst upon him. Stage managers, chorus singers and stage hands were gasping in dismayed and distracted whispers. The conductor of the orchestra was tearing his hair. Staring with the wild eyes of a tragic mask the man at the curtain hung on the rope waiting for somebody to give the signal to lower it. A singer in costume, his hot eyes bloodshot under the paint, passed the young author, cursing and spitting before him. One of the sopranos sat on a pile of scenery and wept hysterically. Merelli alone, though his heart was boiling and the ultimate loss would fall on him, gazed with the calm of a great general upon the rout of his army.

His gross, jovial, blue shaven cheeks were livid and massive as the head of a Caligula.

The Maestro heard the last note of the singers and the orchestra reduced to silence by the clamour. A dying wail came from the bassoon as there broke out a loud many-voiced roar, made up of shrieks, hisses, howls of execration and shouts of laughter, the angry animal bellowing of the furious mob—a sound that drowned every other sensation. For ten seconds he stood paralysed, unable to subdue the choking that gripped him by the throat. No one spoke to him or seemed to see him, thank God! Then the rattling curtain fell at last and shut out the bestial din, reducing it to a distant booming.

Senseless with horror he rushed out into the neighbouring streets, The old man on the hotel sofa ran with him. Running, running, running blindly on. Keen as when he first experienced it, the shame gnawed. No later triumph had ever conquered it. Inability to forget was the curse under which the Maestro lay. The hardest sacrifice he had ever made to duty had brought him only derision; a sacrifice made for an impresario to whom he would not break his word.

He ran through the empty night, the stone in his throat still choking him. Unconsciously his steps brought him to the house in the Corsia di Servi where, after the death of his wife and children, he had found a lodging. He shut the door, without striking a light he took three steps forward in the darkness, and at the fourth entered his empty, dusty room.

Here he waited an hour, two hours. Would they come there, whistling and

catcalling, or leave him alone? He waited another half-hour. But nobody came, or whistled, or called—not Borromeo, nor Passetti, nor one of the theatre crowd, most of whom owed him thanks or money.

An endless night! For several minutes the Maestro lived through the drama again, with all its lonely outbursts of rage, its stupors and suicidal thoughts.

When the grey light showed in his window his resolution was taken: never to write another note! And since he had renounced this cursed calling for ever, all that remained for him was to become a hired pianist. With great luck a concert player, perhaps, but more likely a purveyor of dance music. Bagasset! Bagasset! He saw the miserable skeleton figure creeping out of some shed in the morning and taking his way, the fiddle slung on his back, through the streets of Roncole. His father's warning! Back from the metropolis to the village lay the country bumpkin's way.

Once more the Maestro tried to rise from the sofa, but the grip still held him fast.

He had still to watch picture after picture.

With benumbed hands and benumbed mind he sat at his wretched piano and played as if in a ghastly game, the same phrase over and over again, his themes the lime-burner and the humble bee, desert music that filled eyes and mouth and nostrils with sand. Unceasingly, like a Thibetan monk turning his prayer wheel, he played and played. He played the soul out of his body, his fingers and muscles became mere automata, which, when they had perforce to rest, longed to return to their hammering again, to escape from life.

Seven times a day his old neighbour came into the room in his dressing-gown, holding his ears and crying that he was being driven demented. At last the landlord put down his foot. Robbed of his anæsthetic, trashy novels were his only remaining resource, and the Maestro saw himself sitting now in his cheerless room, unkempt, unwashed, half-starved, reading, reading, reading.

A quarrel arose outside the window of Verdi's balcony on the Riva degli Schiavoni. The voices rose higher and danger seemed to threaten, for a cry rang out and knives gleamed. But ere mischance befell a policeman appeared, and the company, coming to a sudden agreement, took flight.

Before the Maestro could breathe again, he was sauntering through the mirror-hung Christopher Gallery in Milan with heavy eyes and a burning head. Outside was the December twilight, within him the twilight of the troubled Italian world. An arm was slipped under his own—the all-powerful Merelli's. They talked of indifferent subjects. The Maestro resting there heard no words, but he perceived the sense of the speech, he even heard the husky overfed voice of Merelli in his ear without distinguishing any word. He spoke with the godlike, patronizing, half-ironic familiarity of the musical director of a theatre to a young and not altogether unpromising author. Otto Nicolai, the German, who had come to Milan to make a career for himself, had refused a libretto by Solera and as it was an excellent and remarkable piece of work, an obvious opportunity presented itself.

Outside heavy half-melted flakes of snow were falling—his eternal enemy, the hated snow!

Merelli was speaking with the irritating cynicism of the theatre director, about singers and composers. He allowed the young man to detect in his words the good-humoured implication that he was much too big a fellow to be influenced by one instance of unfavourable press and public opinion, and that he still considered Verdi worth consideration—in short, that there was still something to be made out of him. That was the meaning which the Maestro read into the wordless conversation he was watching. He wanted to get away, but could find no opportunity to take his leave. Or perhaps he did not altogether want to go, for next he saw Merelli entering the theatre, and a re-awakened spell drawing himself to follow him into the Scale. He struggled with himself, he would not give way, his resolution was taken. But the fat, crafty Merelli knew men better; above all he knew the poor, infirm race of musicians. He played with his

victim, so sure was he of the result. When the Maestro began to take his leave he held him back indifferently for a moment while they promenaded before the ill-omened house and then let him go. Verdi moved away slowly, but Merelli called to him and on some slight pretext lured him into the theatre.

Both to the man who was recalling and the man who was being recalled there came the odour, compounded of the blended smells of linen, wood, paint, grease, decay, rouge and heat that meets one in the door of a theatre. They went into Merelli's office. The pretext, a manuscript which Verdi had sent in long before and of which Merelli pretended to have seen nothing, was sought and found. But there was another manuscript on the writing table. There was no standing out against Merelli. For all his apparent softness he was as proud and self-willed as an emperor. Ignoring his refusals the great man pressed upon the Maestro the blue manuscript bearing the title "Nabucco" in great letters.

Once more the spell of the theatre bound him, the weakness that was his lifelong characteristic, his lifelong curse.

Merelli stuffed the text of the opera in his pocket, and cutting short the discussion showed him to the door, which he shut sharply behind the Maestro with the air of a busy man getting rid of an interruption.

Verdi went out into the wintry street, where the snow was falling thickly. His hand kept touching the manuscript in his coat pocket. He walked more quickly, spurred by the feeling that something frightful was going to happen. He was trying to escape, but it was too late. He was shaken physically, as if in bodily danger, but the warning was not given by his body—it came from elsewhere.

A few steps further and the young man had to stand still and hold on with both hands to the icy ironwork of a gate. A feeling of indescribable horror seized him, an unbearable sense of endangered life, as if death were seeking not merely to separate soul and body, but to kill the soul itself. An unspeakable sense of threatening perdition, something far more than death. The awful *Moment* was upon him.

The Maestro sprang up instantaneously and felt with trembling hand for a light. The gaslight flooded the room. He had escaped by the skin of his teeth from that *Moment* which had threatened him not in recollection alone. Anything, rather than suffer that experience again. Experience it could hardly be called, how to name it he did not know—that last confine of the temporal beyond which the outer horror lay. He had no power against that which lay outside the domain of human life. It would destroy him. Once he had withstood it, but a second time, and in his old age, he could not.

Then, with the light, his sceptical brain reasserted itself and put forward the word—"nerve-attack." Perhaps, but he would face anything—death itself—rather than such an attack of nerves again.

The *Moment*, in those other days, had brought about a crisis. Like one rescued from death he had reached his room exhausted, had thrown the manuscript on the bed without giving it another thought, and stood staring out at the sky. But the manuscript slipped down and fell on the floor, and as he lifted it he involuntarily read the line—

Va pensiero, sull' ali dorate!
Fly forth, my thoughts, on golden wings.

A cramp knitted all his muscles, his body writhed and his throat swelled, his breath was choked until, as neither threefold death nor the ruin of his career had done, a jingling verse unloosed his tears. In those tears melody came back to him.

The earlier break in his career had lasted hardly two years. The awful moment, which came to him on the way back from Merelli's office, had thrown him back into his work.

To-day the interruption had already lasted ten years. He was finished. He had only a tiny scrap of heart—so he said to himself sometimes—now remaining, and that was dry and encrusted. All his efforts were now vain. No verse would fall at his feet to-day and spur him to work again. Only reason, knowledge and practical effort were left to him now, and even for these his powers were failing. Wagner, the conqueror to whom nothing was difficult, was perhaps at this very moment working on a new opera that would once more overthrow and regenerate all men's ideas of music. The "heavy," "deep" German bounded laughing over all obstacles; he had already transformed himself from a revolutionary into a king's favourite; he stormed through the world as if no burden of years could weigh him down. But he himself, the "light," "shallow" Italian, was burdened by every trifle, laid prostrate by memories, the memory of a wife and children dead these forty years harrowed him still, and the crisis of nerves that he called the "Moment" still fevered his pulse.

The Maestro smoothed out the open page of the Lear music. Even this was only a duty task, for it was one of his deepest convictions that no man had the right to live idle and produce nothing.

While he was clearing up he came across Fischböck's manuscript again. Once more he felt the certainty that the young German, in spite of his musical nihilism, had in him something more than youthful folly or the delirium of fever.

He himself must carry on his work unmoved by the world's opinion. The aims of this generation, perhaps of the next also, were certainly false. They cared for nothing but to strive against each other for selfish ends.

The blood was still humming in Verdi's ears. Why had the memory of that "Moment" distressed him more than any other? He looked nervously round the quietly watching room as if some unseen danger threatened him. And desiring to breathe freer air he went out upon the balcony.

The water stretched below, losing itself in the darkness. The stillness of the night was unbroken and complete.

4

Verdi could not forget his sudden anger against the Senator, and, in his remorse, visited his old friend often. But after each visit his sense of guilt increased. They never talked of music, and so there lay between them a faint cloud of reserve, such as lies on those who, having lived through some terrible experience together, dare not speak of it again. The Senator's solicitude for Verdi increased tenfold. Every day he sent a servant to the hotel with wine, Havana cigars and books; he wrote notes and cards to him, full of sarcasm, affection and paradox; he did all he could, by jest and earnest, to conquer the uneasy sense of estrangement that separated them.

Such assiduity, as all of us must know from experience, is not only useless but defeats itself. No sickness can be cured until it has been diagnosed, no fatigue overcome until effort has been relaxed, and no doubt dispelled until it has been faced. The Senator's kindness was a form of consolation and it irritated Verdi, to whom all expression of sympathy was abhorrent. Feeling all his efforts ineffectual the Senator redoubled them. He sought early and late to invent better methods, for he had time enough to spare. His work on the classic texts dragged—it was only a sort of moral discipline which he inflicted upon his volatile temperament. Renzo was in Rome, and Italo hardly ever in the house. The Senator realized that his son was living through some great experience, but his liberal principles forbade him to interfere, even by a question, with the liberty of another, though that other might be his own child.

A peculiar sort of egoism developed in him, out of all this, which affected not his own person but the generation to which he belonged. Modern youth did not interest him. Its views and aspirations were too contrary to those of his own great times, for the Senator's faith in his generation was something more

than the ordinary predilection of age for the good old days. He cherished the belief that out of the travail of 1848 a new Messiah, unrecognized and unknown to-day, had appeared to humanity and had given a unique character to that epoch. Overwhelmed and forgotten though the great men of his youth might be, their never-ageing spirit lived still, godlike and unequalled, although despised to-day. Since such a spirit was his inheritance, how could he come to terms with the weakness and irresolution of the present?

To him the clearest incarnation of this divine spirit was in Guiseppe Verdi; his love for the Maestro was bound up with a fanatical worship of his generation. He clung with feverish ardour to the only comrade of war who had not lowered his flag to the degenerate youth of to-day.

Italo he rarely saw except at meals, and the loneliness of his days and nights was only relieved by monologues, fits of irrational excitement, and by his *vino santo*.

Once he had adventured into the splendours of the front rooms to call upon the Marchese and ask after his welfare. But the hour of his visit, seven in the evening, had been ill-chosen, for Gritti was already expecting François to help him to dress for the evening. The Senator, noticing the old man's impatience at having to spend his strength in unnecessary conversation, did not sit down.

"Don't disturb yourself, Marchese," he said soothingly. "I'm just going. But you must tell me one thing—how in the devil do you manage to find an opera to attend every evening?"

"An amateur of art has to know these things," the high, lifeless voice of the diplomat informed him. "Four days in the week the La Fenice company plays, and on the other three there is the Stagione in San Benedetto, or the Rossini as people call it nowadays."

"Ah! Have you heard a prima-donna called Dezorzi?"

With extreme caution the human automaton subdued a huskiness in his throat. Completely engrossed by this important duty he coughed and spat gently, careful to avoid all strain, and finally examined the deposit in his handkerchief with the greatest attention before he gave his answer.

"Dezorzi? Horrible? A glassy voice! No volume, no attack! We should have stoned such incompetence in my day."

In the evening the Senator sat alone at table drinking his wine and zealously revolving his pet problem—how to rescue Verdi from his depression without his knowledge. He emptied glass after glass of his precious wine.

The cheerful, summerlike satisfaction of slight intoxication began to enfold him. He felt inspired and at peace with the world as the wine loosened his hold on reality; complicated schemes of deliverance for his friend revolved in his brain.

The most impracticable of all these schemes, the one least in keeping with Verdi's nature, he finally hailed with a joyful "Eureka!" In the confusion of his brain he was mistaking his own wishes for those of the Maestro. So helpless are men, even the nearest of friends, to help one another.

5

For five days Bianca had believed that her lover was in Rome. In his absence, the wave of conscious and submissive surrender on which she had floated for the last few weeks began to ebb. She no longer felt, with the sense of awed adoration that came to her on the terrace above the Lido, the springlike youthfulness of his presence contrasting so harshly with her own unhappiness.

She had let him go as if she had no claim upon him, no right to hold him near her, as she had let him go on the evening of Count Balbi's concert. But now that he was gone she could no longer bear the separation, nor control her yearning for him. For years Carvagno had left her lonely and of late she had been thankful for it, so that she need not talk and lie, and perhaps betray herself to him.

There were endless hours in which she was left alone with her horror of this encumbered body that was growing so strange to her. Her dread of the future, which robbed her of all the compensations of her condition, was redoubled. Often she sent the maid out and, undressing herself, wandered through the chilly wintry rooms, regarding her body with indescribable dismay. She saw how heavy and ungainly she had grown, how heavily her breasts hung down over her heavy body, how her legs, no longer slim and lithe, moved stiffly on the swollen, easily tired feet.

She looked at herself with loathing, and thought of Italo's grace, which less now than ever matched her strange misshapenness. Would he not turn from her in his love of beauty to some unspoilt and lovely girl? She cursed the child that had made her into this hateful thing—the unasked for, unwanted child with which the Madonna had punished her after all these years.

A trifle served to render her distress altogether intolerable. She had broken a tooth, a side tooth, whose loss was hardly noticeable, and this seemed to her the most shameful misfortune, a symbol of inevitable destruction. She wept si ently over it for hours.

Her love for Italo, swollen by all this self-detraction, increased to madness. She could have cried aloud, hammered the walls with her fists, and thrown herself senseless on the floor in her agony.

Church-going, prayers, confession no longer helped her, she was too completely sunk in her misery, which every day of his absence, every footstep that was not his, served only to deepen.

A letter from Italo might have helped her. An hour before post time she was already wandering, white-faced, from room to room, neglecting her housework, forgetting even to offer fresh lettuce to the tortoise, till the post came and brought no letter from Rome. A helpless wretchedness, a choking pity for herself, cursed her life. She sat and stared before her, thinking. "Why does he not write? He has been five days in Rome. Five letters might have come. Why doesn't he write?"

But she found a hundred excuses for her lover, conjured up a hundred chances that might have hindered him from writing, for she had no reason to believe that Italo did not love her. He had not looked at another woman once in the last eighteen months. She had observed him closely and laid little traps for him, asking innocently: "Isn't that a pretty girl?" "Do you like that woman's figure?" as they walked together. But he had never been caught. His dark eyes never betrayed a spark of unfaithfulness to her. No, he was true. She could trust him. But Rome! He would meet so many women there. Would he stand firm? A hidden doubt pricked her while she said, "I am sure."

On the Sunday in carnival week Carvagno appeared unexpectedly in her room. Bianca had a headache and was trying to sleep. He looked at her with unusual keenness.

"You are alone."

"Natural y I am alone."

"Your cavalier seems to be rather remiss.":

"What do you mean?"

"Why, surely Italo might have been keeping you company instead of tramping round the Piazza."

"Italo is in Rome with his brother."

"Oh, in Rome is he?"

"Is there anything strange in that, Carvagno?"

"Very strange."

"What is there strange about it?"

"I have just seen Italo going into Floriani's with Corteccia."

Bianca felt that she needed superhuman strength now. She sat up quietly and took some needlework from the table.

"You have seen Italo? Can he be back from Rome already? It's hardly possible."

"He is in Floriani's now."

"But are you sure you weren't mistaken ? Of course, it's possible he's back in Venice. But I can't believe that Renzo can have recovered so quickly. "

She smiled carelessly into Carvagno's face. He began to doubt himself.

"Good Lord ! I could have sworn it was he. But you know, with my bad sight I've made mistakes before."

"Had you your glasses ?"

"Of course I had. I recognized Corteccia with his theatrical beard. And the young man I thought—but you make me doubt my own eyes."

"It's possible that it was Italo."

They were both silent. Suddenly Bianca took out her handkerchief, and Carvagno saw some drops of blood on it. He took hold of her hand and saw that she had run the needle half its length into her palm.

The doctor snapped at Bianca for her awkwardness, and drawing the needle out washed the wound carefully with an antiseptic. He stayed with his wife for the rest of the afternoon. She bent over her useless work like a slave toiling under the lash. Carvagno felt a compunction that surprised himself, and was unusually sociable, relating stories about his patients. His feeling of self-reproach grew stronger and stronger. They had been married ten years, and for the last two, since he had been head of the medical staff of the Hospital, he had hardly spared a day to her. He realized that he had put every trace of feeling for her away, even jealousy, so as to be free for his work. Dazzled by this sudden illumination, he mingled half-formed excuses with his talk—foolish, half unintelligible phrases. His wife bent so closely over her work it was difficult for him to take her hand. Between them stood the consciousness of something at which he could not guess. But his sense of guilt grew stronger and stronger.

At five o'clock and at seven o'clock Bianca was seized with faintness. The second time consciousness did not return for long. Yellow, her hair falling about her, she lay with deeply sunken head.

This anæmia of the brain, with high blood-pressure on the heart, was not, as Carvagno knew, surprising in her state. As she opened her eyes they seemed to entreat him, "Leave me alone !"—but he could not read the fleeting prayer.

Later, when all that his professional skill suggested had been done, she lay in bed in her white nightgown with averted head and, since she had no power to escape, submitted in silence.

Never in his life had Carvagno felt so powerless.

Perhaps she would sleep now.

And although he knew that she was still weak, he left the room on tiptoe with a troubled mind.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRES OF CARNIVAL

1

THE bells of the Campanile were scattering the last golden-orbed notes of the morning mass as the choirmaster of San Marco, successor in office to the divine Gabrieli, came out through the side door from the choir to the piazza. Dazzled by the glare of the summer sunshine of this Carnival Tuesday of sixteen hundred and forty-three, Claudio Monteverdi blinked his grey eyes shaded by honey-dark temples. He stumbled drunkenly forward a few steps on his tall staff and then stopped, waiting till his sight should become accustomed to the glare. The light and warmth that poured over all his frame no longer gave him delight. He stood there stubbornly as if his thin, congealing blood rebelled against its magic, and he was stiffening himself to resist the power of Phœbus. Why

should the Godhead try by this quickening glow to stave off the inevitable end? He was seventy-six and life was but a burden.

The old man glanced up at the Orologio. It was barely ten o'clock, and two long, empty hours lay before him, for the final rehearsal of his "Coronation of Poppea," which the Society of St. Paul and St. John were performing to-morrow as they had done at every Carnival for years, would not begin till noon.

Monteverdi drew a heavy breath, for his heart was constantly heavy now and his lungs constricted. Should he go to the rehearsal after all? Would it not be easy to give out that he was ill, and lie in bed—lie there until he should die? What pleasure was there to him in all this stupid play-acting which was spreading over Venice like a blight?

This was not what he or what Peri had intended when, almost fifty years before, his Orpheus was written. It was the old cry of every reformer, every innovator and rebel whether in art or politics—"Not thus we planned!" He had worked out the ideas of the Florentine Camerata to perfection. He had set aside counterpoint that, with its alternating voices, had obscured the individual soul of song. That soul spoke forth at last, in a clear and single strain. For years it has seemed to him as if Eurydice, evoked again from the old tragedy by his music, were actually following the new Orpheus into the light of day. Music and verse had assumed their true and equal places. No longer did words and notes strive enviously together, but combined, as the sustained, intoxicating recitative soared over the stark groundwork of the bass, to unfold the now sad, now joyous themes that he had willed. Not Æschylus nor Seneca could have accomplished more.

But shake oil with water as you will, it will still float upon the surface. Strive as you will to join song to words—music, the lighter element, will always rise. He, Peri, and Caccini the singer, had founded opera upon a fallacy.

Mankind, unhappy animal, has to mate his high intelligence with those hags, the practicable and the customary.

The hard, strict art of earlier days was dead. The soul of classic drama, its paramount free-flying thought, had aspired to burst and shed the husk of strict composition. And what had come of it? False conceptions had quickly arisen, and through these misconceptions the whole course of music had been changed. "Not thus we planned." For an instant, released from restraint, a people had gloried in the deliverance of music from its bondage, but in the next moment they were binding it again in the fetters of new forms. The tables of stone were broken, and the baser sort, the street singer and the vulgar, had come into their own.

"So Marsyas flayed Apollo," thought the old man sadly, realizing that he had worked not for the deliverance of music alone but for the release of evil also.

It was not drama, Aristotle's heroic handling of emotion, which had resulted, but dramatic music—the new solo and chorus singing with its ecstatic effects upon the senses so eagerly sought after by the crowd. And he, if he were not to be engulfed in it, must retrace his way, step by step. Yet, more and more he saw the unity of his own work being broken up into recitative and aria; he felt himself abandoning his vision of poetic music and giving way to the new, ignoble tendencies. He wrote *da-capo* arias, and light, theatrical canzonette; he composed music to maudlin librettos like that of this Poppea, which the empty-headed Versifax of Busenolli had written for him. Of what use was it, now, to try to set to music any truly poetic work—lofty tragedy as Rinuccini and Strigio had known it? The theatre, under the leadership of clever slave-drivers, reigned supreme; and music, debased to please the popular ear, grew emptier, less musical, and more wanton from day to day.

Reaction had claimed the old man, as it claims so many of the victims of their own disastrous hopes. But although he forswore dramatic compositi o more and more, though before long he had turned again to the madrigals that had inspired his youth, opera was still the secret darling of his heart, and in his sincerest moments he knew that he did not love it less because it had strayed

so far from the great themes of his choice, and had turned to witless melodrama. His theories and his classic taste were offended, but in its dark recesses his music-loving heart rejoiced.

His chief chagrin was the consciousness that newcomers were pushing him from his place, and he uttered many philippics against their profanation of reborn tragedy. The outstanding names of Cavalli, Ferrari, Sartorio, Legrenzi and Sacrati were the chief objects of his scorn. Francesco Cavalli, in particular, some thirty years younger than himself, had already gained a reputation for the operas which he was producing in rapid succession—Apollo, Daphne, Narcissus. Upon this quarrel the world of the theatre was split. Cavalli was not only the chief culprit in the perversion of music, but he had neglected, in his ignorant vanity, to wait for the retiral of his predecessor and countryman, the famous choirmaster of San Marco.

Claudio Monteverdi took off his broad hat and let the wind stir his flowing hair, he loosened the cape of his cloak and threw it back, revealing the black scholar's gown beneath.

Striking the flagstones sharply with his long staff he slowly paced the piazza. Music-seekers, pleasure-seekers, workmen and tradesmen thronged there. Along the colonnade great candelabra had been erected, crowned by pans of pitch.

Garlands were already hanging in gay semicircles between the pillars, flags began to flutter and bunting to appear at one window after another; slowly the three giant banners of the Republic climbed the flagstaffs and flew aloft. The crowd increased every minute; the cries of buyers and sellers, the snatches of song, the banter of lovers and acquaintances, the noise of a thousand voices, grew deafening. Everywhere redoubled preparations were being made for the day's festival. Benches and stages were being erected for the state functionaries and authorities, for the nobility and for the musicians. Between two pillars on the piazza there already rose the funeral pyre of the mock king.

The old musician who had re-awakened antique tragedy stood looking round him upon the noisy, irreverent Venetian crowd. Bitterness was in his heart, for with the monomania of age he held the townsfolk guilty of all real and imaginary misfortunes of his life—for his disappointments, for the coming of another generation, for his age, for the failure of his beloved art against which even in that early day disparaging voices were raised. "*Oh, urbs vilis*," he quoted Jugurtha's cry from Sallust, for his sympathies were all æsthetic and classic, as his work showed. "Oh, vilest of cities!"

He spat before him as he added, "Harlot of eleven theatres, I hate thee, and thy profligate crowd."

When he had thus delivered himself his thoughts turned yearningly, as they hourly did, from this noisy, shameless, songful city of his native Cremona, the home of his youth, where he would one day die.

But *his* Cremona had little in common with the town that bears this name. His was a phantom place which answered all his longing, a dream-city of wondrous squares and streets and palaces, of eternal sun and skies that shone unchanged since his vanished childhood.

At this moment, as if evoked by his longing, he heard a cry:

"Sior! Sior!"

A young man, who had recognized him from the window of a coffee-house, ran towards him with outstretched arms.

"Ah, my Gasparo! You here!"

Gasparo was a small, wild-haired, dark-clad figure.

"Oh, honoured sir! Your friend and mine, the great Master Nicola, charged me to seek you out while my business keeps me here."

"Very kind! Very pleased! And how is it going at home?"

The old man, who would not now have known a quarter of the people in Cremona, still called it home. He confused the Cremona of his dreams with Gasparo's Cremona. The boy blinked eagerly, anxious to do his best.

"Much as usual. That's to say, Pomphilia Bertuli, the apothecary's wife, is dead. Did you know her, sir? She was only twenty-three."

"Yes? Very possibly. Oh, yes, naturally. Why not? And Master Nicola Amati, who sent you to me, Gasparo, how is he?"

"He's on his travels! In Tyrol, in Carnuntum, in the wilderness, or, as the poet says—'In Panonia's land'!"

"Yes, yes. And what has taken him on this fatiguing and dangerous journey?"

"He's gone to buy maple-wood, sir. A special sort of maple-wood that we need in the workshop."

At the word "workshop" Monteverdi's indifferent look gave place to one of unconcealed eagerness.

"Ah, my good Gasparo! I feel that you have brought me something, a present from your master."

"Quite right, your honour! Nicola Amati has sent you two of his newest violas to choose from. You will be delighted."

"Let us go at once! Where are your lodgings, Gasparo?"

"Not far from here, Sior! At a widow's, whose house I wouldn't recommend to any decent man."

"No matter! Come along. The great, the only Amati has sent me two of his divine violas. Quick, quick!"

Old Monteverdi was transformed.

He no longer leaned on his stick, but carried it raised off the ground so as not to impede his steps. He pushed forward energetically on his wasted septuagenarian legs.

Like so many men who have not fully realized the possibilities of their life, the old man was possessed by a mania. It was for Cremona violins. As another might be infatuated by a picture, so he doted on a new fiddle from the clean, sweet-smelling workshop of his great townsman, the Cremona violin-maker, who laboured there with such unceasing industry and enthusiasm, and, as all the world knows, with such unparalleled skill. He loved the violin not only as an instrument of music, but as a perfect form, a creature fascinating and inexhaustible as a woman.

Nicola Amati, the last of the great dynasty, and uncle of Andrea Amati, had already presented three of his best creations to the famous author of "Orpheus," "Ariana," and "Ulysses," who preserved them sacredly, as in a monstrance.

As Monteverdi and his earlier associates, Peri and Caccini, had raised the single dramatic voice out of the mingled mass of notes that composed the older music, so out of the coarser shapes of the *viol di gamba* and the bass viol, the modern violin had evolved—a form whose surpassing beauty is the crowning glory of Italian handicraft.

When Monteverdi and his companion arrived at the house of the dubious widow, the old man, determined to risk no interruption, bolted the door of the room behind them. Beautiful as the dawn, the violins emerged as Gasparo undid their hundred wrappings of gauze and silk and brocade.

With trembling hands the composer seized one after the other and laid it against his breast, as if the weight of his superhuman happiness was too great for him to bear. He might have been welcoming a lover from the stars, a heavenly Beatrice to his bosom, as he pressed them, one by one, to his overcharged heart. Then, lest their fragile forms should crumble in his mortal grasp, Claudio Monteverdi laid the lovely sisters reverently by and tore himself away, whimpering and weeping in an unbearable ecstasy of pain and pleasure.

He wept because their beauty was more awful to him than the sight of God upon the cross.

Gasparo sought to calm the old man anxiously.

"Sir! Honoured sir!" he stammered, "shall we try them now? I have written a really modern sonata with double stopping specially for you, by my master's orders."

Monteverdi waved the boy into silence as he again examined the Amatis carefully, his thoughts still wandering and confused with joy. They were not very large, slender and beautifully carved; one was varnished a bright yellow, the other red. The varnish lay upon their bodies in strange, lovely, super-sensual designs, as if the invisible landscapes of music had been caught by some magical sense and pictured there. His thoughts dwelt upon the mystery of a violin body—God himself could hardly have created so perfect a shape. Many mysteries must a man have compassed, much ghostly and secret knowledge won, long must he have chastened his flesh and kept himself from woman before a form so noble could have been conceived.

Science has not yet established beyond dispute the number of elements which compose the human body. Eighty-three elements go to make up the slender body of a violin—a composite unity which, like the "Word" of Holy Writ, has a significance both in the world of sense and in that world which lies beyond. Is it not conceivable that the eighty-three pieces into which the body of Orpheus was rent are reassembled here?

Why else is this form at once so human and so divine in its grace? Broad in the shoulder, narrow in the hips, slender-necked! The ravishing outline of the sound-hole, hieroglyphic of all knowledge, the delicate fineness of the ribs, the curve of back and breast, and—purest, most incorporeal of all viscera—the strings, the bridge and the bow!

Gasparo took one of the violins and drew from it the chord Sol-Re-Si-Sol, the deep harmony of the lower fifth blending with the two higher notes. Every piece of wood and metal in the room vibrated. Each tiny atom of matter in the endless universe, in the stars, in the ether, and in all creation, answered to the call of that divine chord. The old man could bear no more:

"Bring those blessed ones to my house to-night, my Gasparo. We will eat together and then you will play your Sonata with the double stopping."

Fixing his eyes on the lovely creatures as if he could never tear them away, he said:

"Justly was the similitude of a violet chosen for you, violet blue is your note, dark violet blue! Till evening, my Gasparo! I wait."

As misfortune would have it, Claudio Monteverdi, going out, met a priest and the sexton on their way to a funeral. It was, he felt, a bad omen, and a cold shiver ran through him. Beads of perspiration came out on his brow. A premonition came to him in that superstitious moment that he should die in the course of the year. He hesitated whether, in the hour that still remained before the rehearsal, he had better go to confession or to see his doctor. Since the plague of 1630 the least indisposition had thrown him into this state of anxiety. But he vindicated his freedom of thought by seeking comfort in science rather than religion. He went to the doctor.

His doctor, who was also his friend and not unknown to fame, Gianbattista Carvagno, lived and practised in the professional quarter on the other side of the Rialto bridge. This companion of the composer's youth had obtained his initiation into the higher mysteries of magic in Prague at the Court of Rudolf the Second. Later, he turned passionately against the occult arts and, like a true renegade, reviled them violently. Of his alchemist days the doctor now retained no mark except the long pointed beard of the astrologer, for the erstwhile Grecian and adept in the black art had become a rationalist and a scientist.

Monteverdi found his friend bent over an early professional folio. Gianbattista Carvagno, who liked to astonish his friends by his erudite discoveries, immediately began:

"It is always so. The feeblest minds have a great following, and the truly great remain unknown. This Paul of Niceæ is a ten times greater physician and discoverer than Hippocrates. He teaches that wind, the movement of the atmosphere, is the strongest of all the influences that produce disease. . . ."

The musician, who was in no mood to listen to a medical lecture, interrupted the doctor:

"I feel unwell, very unwell. Tell me the plain truth, my friend. How many months have I to live?"

"My Orpheus, you are the worst hypochondriac I have met in the course of my life. But in order to answer your question professionally, without respect of person, we must hold the proper major auscultation required by this young wise-acre from Niceæ."

So the old musician had to lay aside his outer clothing and be tapped and listened at and questioned. After the examination Gianbattista helped his friend to resume his clothes.

"I see no reason, my Monteverdi, why you should not live to be a hundred."

"But I am not well, not at all well. My heart doesn't act any longer, and my breathing is bad."

"You have no disease. All diseases, as we know, are caused by the bile, namely, fever, ulcers, rheumatism and gout. Your bile is in good order."

"What is wrong, then?"

"You suffer from Nature."

"What is that?"

"From time, for—as a high authority has well said—time fossilizes all our tissues. The life force itself has this mineral-forming effect, and there is no help for it."

Hardly had the Maestro left the room before the doctor drew out a folio and made an entry under the heading M. He wrote for a while, and finally in the column headed "Calculation of lethal period," he wrote in large letters the Latin word: "Autumno."

In the open air Monteverdi's mood underwent a strange alteration. He felt suddenly so young and full of good will that all the painful, bitter recollections which had tormented him before were blotted out. Was it the sight of the violin, that mystic messenger, which cheered him so? Or was it the unmistakable impression he had received, that the doctor had given him up for lost?

Plans, that he knew well he should never carry out, crowded into his charmed mind. He dreamed of a singing, soaring choir of a hundred celestial violins. The human voices of the stage, the voice of the dismembered and reborn Orpheus, and the violet-dark voice of the viola were mingled in his dream.

Beatified, the old man lent over the stone balustrade of the bridge. He heard below him the roaring of the excited Carnival crowd. But his dim eyes saw nothing. Whence came this overmastering happiness following so hard on the sad and peevish thoughts of the morning? What spirit had entered into him, pervading all his being?

Half-framed thoughts that lingered only for a moment filled his strangely uplifted heart.

"All is a mighty synthesis. The worlds and the gods play together in a gigantic game. There is no isolation. From the individual nothing springs. The individual is a figment of the brain. But out of these figments a higher purpose creates truth, and for that end they exist. We bring nothing to pass of ourselves, and therein lies the meaning of the words, 'Thy will be done.' This is our end and purpose—that through us God's will should be done. All art is but a whisper we have heard and spoken out again. And he whose ear is keenest will speak in clearest tones. Ah, to be such a violin. . . ."

Claudio Monteverdi stretched his arms wide. In that moment the sound of the voices from the canal below rose like the blaring of brazen instruments, like the booming of cannon at sea. And the old man saw a fleet of State gondolas, gold-overlaid, scarlet, rose-coloured, white, silver, silvery grey, sulphur yellow, safron yellow, grass green and cardinal red, with oarsmen dressed in the same colours, following the high-swung, snake-pillared Bucentoro in which the President of the State of Venice sat in ceremonial splendour. Outspread over the green, churning water, lengths of velvet and brocade trailed behind the gaily-coloured boats. A crowd on both banks of the canal roared, drunk with jubilation, as the pomp floated by.

Next came a dazzling rearguard of a hundred other gondolas, boats and barges, hung with wreaths and bunting and gay with fluttering flags, rocking on the shattered mirror of the canal. In these sat masked men, who day and night for the last week had not laid aside their masquerade. A thousand theorbos, guitars and mandolines twanged loudly and harshly, a thousand cries, hoarse with night revelry, or clear and shrill, rose in a long infernal howling as the voices were thrown inarticulately against the resonant palate. Yet all the mad, thousand-tongued clamour seemed to be *one*, the wild, conglomerate voice of the people. The rising waves of sound swept over the old man resting on the bridge.

"Down there ! Down there ! Ah, we have gone far, far astray, we and our learning. Life alone does not err. Not I, but these—the many—know it truly. Synthesis ! Here is the truth at last ! For sixty years I have sought by the one supreme, forth-speaking voice to give true art expression. To-day, in my seventy-sixth year of life, I have learnt that it is the many, the sum total, that is sacred. To it belongs a deeper, more mysterious greatness than the individual, ever vain of itself, seeking its refuge in the conceit of minority, can attain. The people want their melodrama, their lyric opera—lofty recitative wearies them. Must we not begin again, make concessions to them, find other themes than those of Greek tragedy ! They are not the Greeks we pictured them ! Their hearts are not torn by speculation or worn by reflection; it is the aria, the canzonetta, that they desire. To write intellectual music or to write for the people—that is the question. But when you write for the people, see that you do not lie ! The unfolding of experience alone reveals truth. Our criticism is but bitterness of heart, the cry of solitary pride against that unfolding.

"Forward, Francesco Cavalli !

"I can no longer put this revelation that has come to me to use. I must keep silence lest I be found a heretic and blasphemer against the music of the people. For in the people more than in our theories and philosophies and individualities is God's will being fulfilled. Whatever God may be, a dying mortal can only say, 'Thy will be done.' "

The many-hued, rocking, resounding mass below swam before the old man's eyes. He closed them, dizzy and wearied.

Half an hour later Claudio Monteverdi stood on the deep, narrow stage of the theatre of St. John and St. Paul, where the workmen had been busy for days upon the elaborate scenery of his "Poppea." A thick-set man entered on extraordinarily high heels and made an exquisite bow to the old man. It was Tiburzio Califano, the singer—moustachioed, corpulent, and goggle-eyed, he opened his wide round mouth:

"Most worshipful ! May I make a request ?"

"At your service."

"With your deep insight into questions of art, you will not be annoyed with me if I say that the role of Lucianus, which you have given me, seems to me a little thin . . . not quite as full as it might be, if one may say so. . . ."

"Ah, does it seem so to you ?"

"And so, since I too, without in the least degree daring to rival your own dazzling Italian reputation, since I, too, have courted the muses a little—well, the fact is, I may say I have not been altogether unsuccessful as a composer myself. The famous Francesco Cavalli has spoken with unrestrained approval of me. In fact, I had a very complimentary letter from him to-day. Perhaps you would be good enough to take a look at it ?"

"No, thanks, not at all. I'll take your word for it. And what then ?"

"I have composed a little song for Lucianus myself, a pleasant, cheerful little thing, the sort of *pezzo staccato* thing that people like nowadays. I assure you, sir, it will brighten up the work considerably, relieve the monotony, if I may say so. I crave your kind permission—my colleagues are quite agreeable and the musicians know the accompaniment. You may rest easy."

The old man smiled stiffly, as if the suggestion did not altogether please him. Then he made Tiburzio Califano a gracious bow:

"Most certainly! If it will give you any pleasure. By all means! Do whatever you wish! But listen to me, young Maestro. Of himself the individual can do nothing—the individual can do nothing! Man can but fulfil his futile tasks. Each of us. Unceasingly! Basta!"

At these words Tiburzio hurried away to tell the news proudly to the other singers, declaring that it was all up with the "Vecchio," the poor old chap was already losing his wits. By the tenth repetition Monteverdi's words had been given such a comic turn that everybody was convinced of his complete senility. Most of them dismissed the idea that they could do nothing themselves as simply meaningless. Girolamo Squarciabeve, the leader of the basses, spat contemptuously:

"It's high time that we and the public were rid of all this long-winded rubbish."

Shortly afterwards the same Squarciabeve and the rest of the company were astonished to see that Claudio Monteverdi was conducting the final rehearsal of his "Coronation of Poppea" with as clear a head and as sharp an ear as ever.

2

The text of an opera is good only when it means nothing.—*Vincenzo Bellini, quoted by Colombani.*

The revelation that came to Claudio Monteverdi as he looked down from the Rialto bridge upon the clamour of life below was the simple truth. The recitative drama of the Florentine Camerata was a scholarly error, and had its roots only in the intellect. When the time was ripe this literary error was brought to the light. Life, in this case Venice, took that which had been born of this error —all the formalities of style and construction, all that was foreign to the mind of the people—and, with the careless assurance of instinctive wisdom, cast it forth. The music-drama of æsthetic Florence fell dead, and opera was born.

Step by step the poetic drama, in whose psychological fetters music could not be bound, was left behind. Steadily, step by step, opera rose, conquering, as no art form had previously done, the cities, the country, and the people.

Only in that which can establish itself practically does truth exist, not in the protests of the theorists, the intellectuals, whose nerves are unequal to the strain of practical life. All such minds, everywhere, hate opera. And in every case melody routs the moralist. Seas of ink have been poured out to prove that opera is a meaningless form, by people who lack that respect for life which recognizes that the existent and actual are far more deeply grounded in reality than all our logic, our theories of beauty, our dreams of culture.

Who has seen reality? Very few. Henri Beyle, perhaps, who went to the Scala every day.

After Monteverdi, the Venetian opera of the seventeenth century was planted by Alessandro Scarlatti of Naples and cultivated—to name only world-famous names—by Cavalli, Carissimi and Cesti. It has blossomed, as those who praise it, or declined, as those who revile it, say, down to the nineteenth century. Whoever may be right, a German romantic, Hoffman, has enthusiastically declared the Area *Ombra adorata* of Zingarelli, the Neapolitan, to be the noblest known embodiment of pure melody.

And now, on the sixth of February, the Carnival Tuesday of 1883, exactly two hundred and forty years after that poignant hour in which Claudio Monteverdi wept before the Amati violins, Richard Wagner and his friends were debating whether or no the Piazza was the best place from which to view the approaching Carnival. The question was decided by a new friend of his who, several days before, had hired a room for this purpose in the Capello Nero.

Two hundred and forty years after Venice, the city of opera, had entombed the body of Monteverdi, she was harbouring Richard Wagner. He, the avenger of Monteverdi, had resurrected, unquestioned, the principle of the recitative music-drama, and re-established it triumphantly. And now this auto-intoxicated

hero was moving in a blaze of fame through the restless streets and over the lighted, shadowed canals of the water-lapped, music-haunted city. Venice, the enemy, chuckled softly to herself under the soft beat of her oarsmen's *Ganazetto*.

Still another musician was listening from his hotel window on the Riva of the slaves to the multitudinous, droning voice of the Venetian people. Once more, as so often before, he sat hopeless and at his wits' end before his work. He was less happy than either the dead or the living.

By a strange freak of fate the makers of opera, that joyfullest of all created art, are often plunged in misery themselves. Mozart was buried in a pauper's grave. Spontini died a paranoiac, Donizetti a paralytic, Bellini in his thirtieth year. Rossini lived his last four years in a genius-cloaked neurasthenia that made it impossible for him to write another note. The brilliant conversationalist —the white-capped chef of the social kitchen—fell grey and stricken upon his bed as soon as the horde of flatterers and parasites that flocked round him had taken their leave, and he writhed in avaricious anguish over every sou he spent. Gluck, so legend has it, died of alcoholic poisoning. Bizet, until Carmen brought him success, struggled with disaster.

Opera is a frenzy, a delirious self-immolation in which the god too often belabours his priests with the deadly thyrsus.

Maestro Giuseppe Verdi had come to Venice to meet himself face to face.

3

Towards five o'clock in the afternoon the Senator called for the Maestro at his hotel. Every soul in Venice was afoot. The old man hoped that the Carnival spectacle would distract the sadness of the Maestro's mind for an hour or two.

Fanatic for solitude as he was, Verdi had loved the explosive music of the crowd from childhood. In Paris he would wander for hours in places frequented by the people, in the thronging boulevards, before the theatres and shops, or in the markets. All thought suspended, he would let himself go with the stream whence he drew a mysterious comfort, for to be a pure, selfless voice in that choir was joy to him.

He fell in readily with the Senator's proposal. The last days of January had been clouded and stormy, but this final day of the Carnival wore a dangerously springlike air. Behind the crowded Riva and gaily decorated town the full red sun swung low over the distant background of the snow-clad Alps. The April blue of the lagoon was shot with dancing purple lights, and the gilded façade of San Giorgio stood out sharp and spectacular, as if under the glare of footlights. The ranked houses of Giudecca across the canal and the lagoon of San Marco echoed the salvos of sunlight from a thousand glittering windows. In front of the hotel from which the two men emerged, a fairly wide platform with an encircling balustrade had been erected. On this stood a heated kiosk, which the Carnival committee used as their office. Count Balbi, excited and full of importance over the greatness of the day's task, had already taken his place there, although the procession did not start until ten in the evening. His general staff, a band of young men distinguished by white arm-bands, were passing in and out with important, harassed looks.

"Ninnies !" growled the Senator. "They are playing at being 'The People' now, these young bloods." And as the Maestro made no reply, he added, "Of course, my own sprig, Italo, must be among them !"

Over the whole width of the Riva, with all the warring elements of an actual flood—rising waves, eddies, whirlpools, and rapids—surged the crowd. On the two bridges, over the canal of the Prison and the canal of the Palace, it was massed so solidly that, seen from below, it seemed impossible that the knot could ever be unravelled again. In these days few visitors came to Venice. The

neutralizing element of English and German travellers that blunts the edges of national character in a crowd to-day was almost entirely lacking. Only a few steamers lay in the harbour, one from Constantinople, one from the Piræus, and two others from ports in the Levant. The multi-coloured dresses of many women shone vividly in the crowd, and since early morning Carnival-mad men in masks and costume had filled the streets, so that it was difficult to distinguish a real from a masquerading Chinaman. Genuine and costumed friars alike walked with naïvely eager eyes, for the clergy had laid aside their reserve for the day and mingled with other men. The marvellous thing was that in all that gigantic, clangorous, surging mass no insulting epithet or coarse word or angry remark was heard. So genial is the heart of the harmony-loving children of the Mediterranean, that not for a moment did any sudden discord interrupt that mighty unison.

The two distinguished Italians walked with friendly smiles among the friendly folk, who, with their instinctive respect for rank and worth, constantly made way for them. On the Piazetta the stream had thinned a little and the two friends were able to draw themselves out of it. From the Cathedral the three heavy banners of the State and City streamed out proudly like a song of triumph.

The classic hats of some fellow Risorgimentists caught the Senator's eyes and he turned aside, but the Maestro, wishing to avoid recognition, held back.

"I will go and listen to the music, old man," he said.

Always faintly embarrassed in his old friend's company, Verdi was glad to be alone for a little.

The great square lay before him, unencumbered by the crowd, which had melted here to a number of moving groups that did not hinder his passage. Although the last glow of sunset still streamed over the Piazza, the three hundred and fifty festival gaslights were already burning, and in the dual light thus created everything stood out with redoubled clearness. In the middle of this most enormous of all music halls two great bandstands had been erected. The municipal orchestra, San Marco's great brass band, was already playing.

Standing there by the great church the Maestro could not distinguish more than an occasional strain from the band—a swelling unison, perhaps, or the piercing, joyous note of the solo piston, and as he looked across to the men swaying there in the ecstasy of the music, the moving instruments, golden and glistening in the evening light, recalled the shining bodies of a group of bathers. As he came nearer, he recognized the final flourish of the Symphony in Rossini's *Gazza ladra*. The Maestro was not one of those scornful, hypercritical musicians who hold their ears in affected torture when they have to listen to an orchestra that is nothing wonderful, conducted by a man who is not quite a god. He had begun his own career in a town band, and he was too simple to be disturbed by the crudeness of such a performance. His spirit soared instinctively on every wind of music.

Naturally he was more attracted when his own music was being rendered. An unvouched-for story goes that once in the baths at Montecatini he hired a band of thirty street organs to play his music. That legend probably rose out of the fact that at one time, owing to a fashionable prejudice against their popularity, the tunes from Rigoletto, Trovatore, and Traviata were never publicly performed. He may—who knows?—have rewarded the street musicians for playing pieces out of La Battaglia di Legnano, Macbeth and Simone Boccanegra—operas of which, though they were but little known, he was proud.

The listeners stood in close rows around the great semicircle of the bandstand, across the opening of which, like a stage, a red cord was drawn. The piece was finished. The bandmaster, a little, white-haired man in a sort of sailor's uniform, laid his baton on the balustrade and began to talk with the broad-shouldered, bearded drummer, who tapped with his fingers on the kettledrum as he spoke. The trombone, the bass tubas, the bass clarinets, the bombardons and *contrafagotti* of the musicians rested on the iron balustrade.

The musicians themselves, simple people uneasily conscious of their prominence and of the observation of the crowd, were talking with assumed indifference or forced jocularity to their public.

This public consisted of women with children in their arms, sailors and soldiers, some ragged, music-loving tramps, half-grown boys and a few old men, already as good as dead, whose staring eyes were never lifted from their strange inner visions. Over the whole multitude that had come to a standstill in the square lay the distinctly perceptible spell of melody and conscious holiday. The Maestro knew the irrational blessedness of the state well—the spell of Venice and her music.

In every other country music has owed its origin to some non-musical cause. The chorale of the north was inspired by the Scriptures, the French chanson by romantic love, the German suite by the dance. Arioso alone, the Melisma of Italy, pure melody, was derived from no religion, no gallantry, no rhythmic excitement, but from the intangible impulse of sheer sound. Its influence was plainly to be seen in the face of the crowd.

A name rose to the Maestro's mind, and at the same moment he saw the man: Mario. The cripple was seated in a chair near the musician who had to attend to the smaller percussion instruments. His feeble body exhausted by the vibrating band music as by an electric bath, the improvisateur stared before him with bent head. His attendance at this concert was, perhaps, the first result of Verdi's effort on his behalf. As the Maestro caught sight of Dario, who was blustering in the centre of a group of listeners, he moved away from the band towards the Procuration. Here, from one of the cafés, several tables had been set out in the open, for the warmth of the day made it possible to sit out of doors comfortably.

A group of people, three children and three of their elders, was leaving one of the tables at which a considerable company sat. The children, a boy and two girls, ran on in front. Flanked by two other men, one a giant, the second smaller and submissive-looking, came the slender yet impressive figure of Richard Wagner. As always, he was talking energetically. As always, the insufficient frame swayed and strained under the force of the stream of energy that daily and hourly flowed from it. The three men followed the children towards the musicians' platform.

The Maestro stood transfixed. A nervous tremor ran through him from head to foot. Wagner!

For the second time he had encountered this man holding forth strongly to his followers. For the second time, rooted to his place, Giuseppe Verdi awaited the adversary who had so bowed his pride that now all his thoughts and powers measured themselves by this man. Was he to be always mastered thus? Could he, Verdi, suffer to be ruled and subdued by a greater man? It was intolerable to his imperious nature. Although he had come to Venice for no other purpose than to face, to visit, to speak with and listen to this man, to recognize him and be recognized by him, the straightforward, manly step had not yet been taken. His own pride, his own diffidence had been too great. And now once more, in this moment, fate had brought them face to face again.

Wagner had taken the two men, Joukovsky the painter and Levy the choir-master, back to his wife, and was walking on alone, straight towards Verdi. A voice in Verdi's soul cried aloud, "Stop him now, the moment of encounter is come! Now or never!"

Clearer, more instant, grew the face as it approached, as the compressed mouth, the conqueror's nose, the bright eyes revealed themselves.

He would, he would—but he could not. He was no longer free. His eyes were steeled as the cold grip was laid on his heart. Once more, as in the foyer of La Fenice theatre, the brief, occult drama of meeting eyes unrolled, in which more was told and known than either knew or said. Tired and wondering, as if they gazed again on long-forgotten scenes, Wagner's eyes fixed themselves on the hard, proud face of the Italian. Had he seen this face, with

its sealed, purposeful look, somewhere already—in a portrait, a photograph? And once more into these eyes came the same pleading, demanding, feminine look: "Why do you hate me so? Why will you not bow down before the truth, the sole truth, that I am, and join in the universal chorus of praise?"

The Maestro still stood there—unnaturally motionless. And so it happened that before he could shorten his step Wagner's foot struck that of the hypnotized, staring stranger. He turned haughtily, and raising his hat said in Italian:

"Excuse me!"

The Maestro also removed his hat with a little bow and answered as in a dream:

"Pardon! Pardon!"

At the same moment, as if the infernal powers strove to avert this high event, the orchestra began to play the reverberating march out of an Aïda phantasy. The Maestro's first thought was one of horrified vexation that his music should be brought to judgment before his adversary. But, after the first bar, as if suddenly struck deaf, he heard nothing of the music.

He was looking at Wagner, whom the two men had rejoined. In spite of the maltreatment of the band, his enemy must recognize that melody, that mighty melody. He, above all men. The Maestro gazed steadily at the little group that stood near him.

But Richard Wagner seemed not to hear the music; he continued to deliver himself of a philosophical argument to his reverent listeners. His voice rose above the clanging of the drums and trumpets.

Aïda's prayer, the duet with Amneris, the great homecoming finale, were played through, but still the German kept up the unbroken flow of talk.

The Maestro saw all his treasures disregarded. The famous musician, whose name was known in every corner of the earth, looked doubtfully, hopefully, at this other who seemed to have no ear for his song.

The Nile scene followed. Wagner talked on. Aïda's homesick song, her duet with Amonasro. Wagner talked on. Aïda, Radames! Wagner talked and talked.

Never, not even on the night of the theatre fiasco, had the Maestro known such bitterness as in this moment when, in the Piazza San Marco, the bleating brass band played his Aïda to unheeding ears.

The great moment of climax was reached: Amneris, loving and unfortunate, has come to the hero. But he, at the point of death, disclaims her. She throws herself upon him and the heartbroken melody of her cry rings out:

"Would'st thou die? Ah, no! Consent
To live of all my love assured."

Was that cabaletta? Was that trickling cantilene? Was that operatic or conventional? Would he not listen now?

Richard Wagner broke off his declamation and slowly turned his ear to the orchestra as the bandmaster swung into the song:

"My country, my power, my existence,
All, all, I'd surrender for thee."

Wagner seemed to sign to the others who were about to take up the argument. He leant his head back a little, listening. Ah, yes! Yes! He was listening! He heard!

"All, all, I'd surrender for thee."

A glow passed through the Maestro's veins; he clenched his hands on the pocket of his overcoat. Now he could do it! Now he could speak! He took a step nearer. It made no difference which of the two creators approached the other first.

The cadence of Amneris' song swept on like a cataract.

The Maestro stopped as Wagner turned with a questioning look to Levy. Verdi heard the word distinctly: Aïda. Involuntarily he raised his arm. But Wagner, so it seemed to his excited eye, made a grimace of disgust and his hand stirred in a movement of dismissal.

The band played on—the march of the priests proceeding to judgment.

As if stunned by a blow, the Maestro's brain reeled. Shame, the horrible, deathly humiliation of defeat, filled him. He no longer heard the music, the wistful sweetness of the farewell, the death sentence of the priests, the last glad cry of Amneris out of the gulf that swallowed her. He only knew that the German was talking again, that he was looking anxiously round in search of his boy who had disappeared in the crowd.

"He has children," was the thought that came to him while Wagner and his companions—who with exaggerated respect kept repeating "Siegfried"—disappeared.

The Senator was breathless.

"At last I've found you, Verdi! I've been round the bandstand three times without seeing you. I was beginning to think you had gone home."

The Senator's cheerful smile quieted his friend.

"I have been listening to an exquisite rendering of Aïda," he said. "What is your programme now, my friend?"

"I have reserved a room for us in a hotel here. We can come back for the masquerade."

"Right! Let's go! I'm very tired."

4

Until Tuesday morning Bianca lay in utter apathy, mechanically accepting the necessary food. The only thing for which she found strength was to pretend sleep when Carvagno visited her. She neither thought, nor felt, nor suffered. Although she was very weak and had ceased to answer any questions, her whole being, consciousness and memory seemed to be gathered up and sent out upon some quest. Where was it wandering and for what did it search? On Tuesday about noon her soul returned. She awoke. Someone was holding her hand—Carvagno.

Her first impulse was to beg the doctor to return to his work, to assure him that she was better, that she felt quite well now, and that her indisposition had been only a natural one.

He allowed himself to be persuaded. It was necessary, for he dared not leave the hospital longer in the lurch.

A comforting languor filled her as her strength gradually returned. The desperate, unconscious racing of her thoughts slackened, her powerless mind recovered its grip, and out of the chaos one face and figure crystallized—Italo.

Once more she remembered all.

Immediately a new confidence came to her, that all was well, that Italo was in Rome, that her shortsighted Carvagno had been mistaken and that it was her longing for Italo of which she had sickened. She wept and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Madonna.

Her burden had been too heavy and had broken her strength. The bitterness in which she walked every day, as in darkness, had reduced her to that state of helpless unconsciousness. But nothing had happened. Italo loved her. She had seen or heard nothing to shake her belief in him. She opened her eyes, still so unaccustomed to sight. The sun shone strongly through the frayed curtain of her bed, and its light caressed her eyes. All the familiar objects were strange to her. She stared at a picture on the wall; it seemed as if she had not seen it for years, but gradually it resolved itself into the familiar group

of Pietro Longhi, and she recognized the figure of the singer with her flowers and ribbons receiving the allegiance of her cavalier.

Without clearly distinguishing them Bianca stared at the figures in the picture. Then, in the next moment, as the sunlight faded from the picture and the curtain swung back, the truth broke over her with a crashing force. Her unconsciousness, the blackness that had fallen upon her mind was only her nature's last effort of self-defence against the growing knowledge that the picture, like the striking of an hour, had finally and irresistibly forced upon her.

She saw Italo with the singer.

She *saw* Italo with the Dezorzi; although she did not know the girl, she saw them both. It was a vision not of the eyes but of a more unerring sense. She had no doubts now. The name of Margherita Dezorzi had only been mentioned two or three times between her and her lover in a tone of indifference. Yet she had no doubts. The sight of the truth had brought such conviction with it that she was not even surprised. It was as if she had heard this truth proclaimed aloud a thousand times, as if it had been known since the creation of the world.

In this clear light strength and decision returned to her. She rose and dressed herself.

She did not know what she was to do, what was to happen, but the command that she obeyed was not to be gainsaid. She had not to think. She had only to go out into the night. She marvelled at the clear voices that spoke within her. She made her toilet with unconscious dexterity, not once looking into the glass, and left the house in the gathering twilight. Her feet, which knew the way so well, led her to the little church that she loved, and she stood there in the darkness. She did not pray, she waited in that quiet place for her unconscious self to gain time and clearness to see its way.

Five minutes after Bianca had gone out Carvagno returned. His preoccupation with her was interfering with his work, and he had done it badly to-day.

Finding his wife gone, he hurried out in alarm into the street. No one could give him any news of her.

He felt a strange prickling and burning within him, the physical lancination of fear. Night had fallen, and Carvagno turned up the collar of his cloak.

The Maestro and the Senator had finished their meal at the hotel and were now walking through the deserted streets to the Piazza. The Senator, whose head was a little affected by the strong chianti and the aroma of his Havana cigar, was once more pursuing his pet theme—the disillusions of life. In spite of the similarity of their experience the Senator's ideas always excited Verdi's opposition. He shook his head in disagreement.

"I don't see what you want. Everything has improved immensely. Take Venice alone ! In the fifties, in the sixties even, where could you have found a more wretched, beggarly place ? I remember when Conti Luigi was burgomaster he reported that a third of the inhabitants were on the pauper's list—actually and without exaggeration a third ! The thirty thousand beggars lived on the other tax-paying two-thirds, and the whole population was in misery. Then think of the infernal state taxes, and the sanitary conditions, the yearly epidemics.

"In the Rigoletto days Vigna took me through the madhouse of San Clemente here. The overcrowding was more abominable than in any Bedlam of the middle ages. Intermarriage and hunger, under the roses of Lombardy, had made lunatics by hundreds. It was horrible to think of. And now in a few years it seems to me as if a new and well-conditioned race has been raised up out of the desolation. I call that success."

"Yes, material success."

"And not only in Venice, in the whole country, even in the states that for more than a thousand years belonged to the Church, the claws of Rome have been cut."

"Quite true ! But the old virtue of the men of the provinces has gone out

of them, and instead you've got a good average type, plodding and unambitious. We are sharing the fate of Middle Germany. What the Prussian system has done there, the Piedmont-Lombardy rule is doing to us. That is what has come of all our dreams."

"To demand more than life offers is immoral."

"Yes, you are still the stark Cavourist. You believe in the practicable, and not in theories. That is the remarkable thing about you. I can understand the Lear music now, my Verdi. For you the hour is always born anew."

Out of the darkness the two men emerged into the Square with its bright encircling glare of light dazzling the sight. Scores of gas-jets burned in the garlanded candelabra in honour of the feast, as in olden days pans of pitch had been ranged at the height of three feet along the length of the colonnade, out of which orange-coloured flames rose flickering through dense rolling clouds of smoke. In the thousand windows of the Library and the Procuration from which hung gold-embroidered draperies, a thousand candles burned, and every cell of that mighty honeycomb glowed with a mysterious core of life.

A fierce excitement such as is awakened by a fire or by some wild celebration in an Eastern temple, filled the faces of all the crowd, and not their faces only. In every limb they seemed to feel an unnatural exaltation which set aside the limitations of space and gravitation. As if beside themselves, men sprang hither and thither in the air, laughing wildly and imitating the motions of a swarm of flies or a flock of birds.

The undulating clouds of light that transformed the Piazza into a glittering scene upon some dream stage, seemed to endow the crowd also with a new character. No one who has ever stood on the stage where a great opera was set will have forgotten this magical effect upon the senses.

Venice, the mighty sorceress, had bound her people in the chains of her own peculiar spell. The eyes of the excited crowd blazed as with the light of duty, a duty of which the mind knew nothing, the duty of mad pleasure-seeking, of fire worship, of song and shouting and incantation. The frenzy which they already felt, which was but the promise of all that the night held, was hardly to be borne.

They were still streaming along the Piazza without aim or order, although the workmen had already removed the bandstands to make room for the procession, and the gendarmes in their three-cornered befeathered hats were already exchanging questioning glances.

The deafening roar of voices swelled from moment to moment.

Unmoved and self-possessed, as if he were the creator and ruler of this frenzied mass, the Maestro walked by the side of his friend, the strength of assured power playing in every muscle. He had forgotten Richard Wagner, who was at the same moment watching the same spectacle from the window of the hired room in the Capello Nero, with the same sense of creative and masterful superiority.

As the Maestro, affected thus in his own way by the extraordinary scene, passed through the dazzled and over-strung crowd, he recognized Mathias Fischböck wandering like a lost soul through these strange foreign surroundings. The young man's marred and unyouthful features were worn and strained, his eyes morose and meditative, and all his air was a protest against the wild scene around him. The crowd, fused into a single element, was like a sea in which he swam exhausted.

Once more the Maestro was surprised to feel the warmth that this antagonistic spirit woke in him. For a moment, in sudden solicitude, he was impelled to follow Fischböck's blond, uncovered head and warn him against the danger of walking hatless in the February night in his feverish state.

But the Maestro repressed the impulse. It would be too troublesome to explain his new friendship to the jealous Senator. Fischböck and he passed each other at some distance on the wide square.

The two friends were now standing in front of the Basilica. From the

terraced roof of the projecting arcade the best view could be had over the Piazza and Piazzetta and out to the lagoon. The old balustrade of the platform had been damaged by the pressure of the three hundred people who had occupied it on the festival of the twenty-first of January, when the square was filled wih. a crowd of twenty thousand persons. On Carnival night the authorities had taken steps to restrict the admittance to this gallery without closing it completely. Vergers were posted at the entrance and only allowed a few—mostly persons of importance, who had cards of admittance—to pass.

As the Maestro and the Senator entered, a lady stepped forward between them and was admitted without question by the respectful attendant. They briskly mounted the steps leading from the choir door and she followed slowly, her light footsteps echoing their heavier tread through the circular tower. Crossing the narrow stone bridge that stretches under the cupola of the dome, the two friends came out into the darkening night air, accompanied by their shadow, the veiled lady.

Here, raised above the lighted square, the air seemed strangely dark as if the festive lights had no power to reach more than a little way overhead. From the gallery only a few persons were watching the turmoil below, and they stood out against the balustrade clearly visible as if upon a stage

As the two men stepped into the light an attendant brought them two chairs. The Senator noticed that the lady had not been offered a seat and he placed his for her, signing to the servant to bring another. Without thanking him, she pulled the chair a little apart and sat down.

Below, the first signs of order were appearing, as the gendarmes ranged the people on either side under the colonnade to leave room for the procession to pass. The single body of the crowd seemed suddenly to have been parted into two long winding limbs. The excitement became more intense and less good-humoured than before. The two great limbs seemed to have been placed physically and morally under restraint, and the empty path between to be ruled by an eager, expectant soul.

The Maestro could see at a right angle across this clearing in the crowd from the colonnade of the Piazza to the Palace, over the dance of ceaselessly moving heads, of a thousand banners and gaslights, over the illuminated windows and, beyond the gondolas on the Piazzetta, out over the dancing waves, which the festival lights rendered visible for several yards in the darkness of the lagoon. In the midst, between two of the watching pillars that stand sentry over the Venetian night, rose the pyre on which the toppling mimic king of the day would shortly meet his doom. The people were in a tumult and a king must be overthrown. Festival and revolt spring from a common source, and in the riotous symbolism of this funeral pyre they were reunited. The bonfire was attended by an executioner hired by the crowd. Drunk with self-importance, he paid no attention to anything around him, but went on earnestly striking match after match, which lighted up the self-sufficient face with reeking flames.

The Maestro started suddenly. Just behind him a trumpet blared out, for the sign to start the procession was given from the gallery of the Basilica.

The wild note slowly died away. Here and there shouts and voices could still be heard.

The masked procession had already been collected on the Riva for some time and was waiting impatiently for the signal. It fell immediately into marching order, marshalled by the president of the committee. Balbi himself had now to take up his place as Claudio Monteverdi in the tableau and the charge of the rest of the procession devolved upon the fifty young noblemen who were his orderlies and lieutenants.

First came a band of musicians in the costume of Dalmatian sailors of the seventeenth century and took their place with a crash of drums in the middle of the Piazza. Various groups followed, a cohort of Roman legionaries and a band of selected young athletes who went through a series of allegorical evolutions, piling themselves into pyramids and other forms, according to the tradi-

tional rules for the "Display of strength." Seventeenth century writers, such as President de Brosses and Saint Didier, have described these allegorical gymnastics of the Venetian Carnival. The custom may have survived, or it may have been an idea of Balbi's to revive it. Of allegory there was very little trace; much more noticeable was the influence of the English craze for sport which was slowly spreading among the youth of Italy. After the gymnasts came a masked group, the meaning of which nobody was able to discover, but, like all the rest, it was loudly applauded. The music trampled on with resounding feet, the red and yellow light played over the thousands of entranced faces which were now quieted by the spell of the pictured scenes. All sounds were silenced except the rising and falling of the applause. In between the set pieces of the Carnival procession there swarmed, like sparrows, many costumed performers who had talent enough to invent and sustain their own roles—clowns, ragamuffins, caricatures of local or political celebrities. These soloists jested and sparred with the crowd on either side, sang, recited, parodied, told ribald stories, and reaped a harvest of laughter.

Group after group continued to appear, many of them arranged by Balbi himself—historical scenes, pictures of eighteenth century life in characteristic Venetian costume. The procession wound alongside the Doges' Palace, past the Church, the Procuration, the Library, and turning, came to a stand round the place where the mimic funeral pyre had been erected.

In order to heighten the effect of his own tableau, Count Balbi allowed an interval to separate it from the main procession. In the arrangement of this Orpheus group, although it was the reproduction of an actual picture, he had found scope for a truly marvellous display of artistic ingenuity. The crowd did not recognize its special distinction among the other scenes, except that a few spectators in the front rank were struck by the beauty of the young performers.

The idea, a high antique chariot drawn and accompanied by a train of torch-bearers, Maenads, Erinnys and satyrs, was a particularly happy one, because it not only allowed the central figures to be raised in full view, but also displayed to advantage the rich brocaded gem and gold-encrusted stuff of which Margherita's costume was composed.

The Maestro leant forward and the Senator chuckled "Aha !"

The Erinnys and Maenads swung their torches or held them erect before the gilded masks which hid their faces. Others made a piercing music upon castanets, bells and pipes.

The great chariot with its gold-rayed wheels to which men in animal masks were yoked, was passing now across the front of the Cathedral—the actors had naturally mounted on the other side of the bridge of the Doges' Palace. It was a sort of car of Thespis, and the dim old velvet hangings that fell round it suited its character admirably. In the flashing torchlight the figures in the car seemed to tower to a supernatural height. Claudio Monteverdi's grey head and tall figure in its scholar's gown leant against the curved back of the chariot. Orpheus in the traditional Roman costume of the seventeenth century stood in front and rested his lyre upon the rail of the car while his right hand held the right hand of Eurydice. Italo's face was not disguised except for the peruke that altered his appearance. He was not acting, but sunk in a trance of delight—the ecstasy of holding that beloved hand so long. Margherita Dezorzi had thrown all her artistic power into the pose and was wholly concentrated on her art. Her whole body, as both the men beside her felt, more than her features, expressed the suffering, the mortal agony of the escape. The moving and beautiful line of her drooping head harmonized perfectly with every fold of the marvellous drapery and expressed the moment of half-awakened sleep and half-dreaming love with a consummate art which few who watched the picture, dwarfed as it was by the wide square, could appreciate.

The Maestro appreciated it. Always, and often against his will, supreme talent in a woman moved him deeply.

"Is that the Dezorzi of whom you were telling me, who is to sing the Leonora part in *The Power of Destiny*"?

"Yes, that is she."

"Look at her! How she outclasses all the others! In spite of the distance one can read the expression on every feature of her face. And the part she has to play there is one that demands the very highest artistic power."

The two men heard a woman's laugh, low and strange, behind them. They looked round, but the seat where the lady had been sitting was empty.

Monteverdi's chariot turned at right angles to them. The Senator could no longer restrain his sarcastic wit.

"You notice my youngster? He's no actor, but the tenor born."

And as Verdi said nothing he added:

"He reminds me of those adorable and dangerous youths who are the seductive heroes of so many of your operas. The Duke of Mantua, for instance: I don't know why, but he always makes me think of Italo. I don't bother about my boy's private affairs. But for the last few weeks Italo has been absurdly set upon a whim. He torments me every day to—to—"

The Senator broke off hastily; he had nearly told Verdi of Margherita's request through Italo, when he remembered that to do so was to give away the fact that he had failed to keep the Maestro's secret. But Verdi noticed nothing. He was still thrilled by the lovely figure of the singer.

5

The music of the brass instruments blared on and jubilant shouts of applause floated over the water, swelling with ever-increasing force and accelerated tempo, for now the central feature of the night's revelry was approaching—the chief attraction of the Carnival. The mimic king was already set up—a red-gowned puppet in an ermine mantle crowned with gold paper, he sagged piteously upon his throne.

So limp and feeble was the king that death or life seemed equal to him. A hundred lackeys danced round his cart, shattering the air with cries and laughter. The two limbs of the human mass pressed forward like caged animals. Already the cordon of the gendarmes was broken in many places, and the uninterrupted outcry lay over everything like a coat of dust.

The poor king was paraded before his people—a harried, baited progress round the square which lasted just seven minutes. The Senator laughed with the rest, the rebel of '48, as he saw the puppet king hastening to his fate.

Beside the pyre the cart came to a stand, and the king was bound upon it. His head fell helplessly forward on his breast and the straw blazed up around him.

As the cries of the crowd rose to madness the Senator laughed, but Verdi looked on moodily. The memory of the theatre fiasco came back to him, as it always did when he heard a popular clamour; and he was thinking of his unfortunate comic opera.

The blaring music was drowned completely. In a hundred little signs the rising temper of the crowd showed itself, their natural enmity to the police awoke, and with a loud whoop the twenty thousand men burst through the restraining lines and crowded, scenting death, around the fire of judgment. There was nothing now to show that a festival, a game, was in progress, or that it was only the Carnival puppet king who was being hounded down, and not an official of the State. Not long before the Irredentist patriot Oberdank had been hanged in Austria, and "Revenge for Oberdank" was in the blood of every Italian.

The myriad figures with their inflamed faces writhed and struggled together as if the massacre of a tyrant and the storming of a Bastille were in progress, instead of the last hours of a festival.

High above the crowd roared the quick blaze of the pyre. The king crumpled weakly and fell into the pile of flaming embers.

The moment of vengeance produced a new disturbance. The doves of the Piazza swarmed out bewildered into this red and fearful day. The pampered bourgeois birds of the sainted Marcus were changed to ravens, to the black-winged fowl of night. They hung in a dark cloud above the place of *Auto-da-fé* like a mourning banner. Higher waxed the last flames lapping the pillars, lighting up the crocodile and St. George with their glare from the underworld, as the lights in the pitchpans began to burn low, and the glow of the funeral pyre spread over all.

The crowd, sated with victory, grew quieter. With the fall of the victim the bloodlust was satisfied, and the desire for ritual, for sympathetic expression, took its place. And now, as every year at the same moment, when the royal scape-goat had taken on himself the sins of the multitude and had been consumed with fire, there rose to the lips of that giant choir the ancient song of the Carnival. Not one of all those thousands ever sang that song elsewhere or in any other hour of the year. It almost seemed as if no single individual knew it, but only the one composite being, the crowd in whose mysterious depths a hundred for-gotten memories were awakened—then and only then. It was neither a cheerful nor a mournful song, but a steady, monotonous chant in the style of a bygone day that signalized the finished festival. Involuntarily, and automatic as a cannonade, rose the song of those twenty thousand voices into which none of the madness born of the fires of carnival entered.

Oppressed and shaken by this song the Maestro rose trembling to his feet. If his thoughts had gone back to Mario's song, in which lay the soul of the Italian race from which the Aria was born, he might have learned from this mighty voice of myriad life that his own opera music with its chorale and finale was a thing neither unreal nor superficial, but the expression of his deepest national being.

But in that moment the Maestro did not reason, he only listened mindlessly.

Richard Wagner also, hearing that song of carnival from the open window on the Capello Nero, had risen to his feet. The sound clutched at his heart convulsively and he listened with closed eyes. In the greatness of that moment even his ever-active will was held suspended.

Wagner's best-informed biographer vouches for the impression made on him by this song. While it sounded in his ears he was powerless to repel its dis-quieting attack. But his was a wholly different spirit from the Maestro's. Proud of his powers and thankful for them, no doubt had power to harm him.

The report of cannon interrupted the song and brought it to an end. The flames still leapt upon the pyre, and out on the lagoon, before San Giorgio, by the Dogana, fireworks flamed into the sky with countless shrill reports and ex-plosions, and catastrophic bursts of colour. The water flamed and the heavens crackled with the storm of pyrotechnics, which, in the Italian fashion, was let loose simultaneously in earth and air. Deafened, the Maestro turned his back on this day of judgment. Against the darkness of the church he saw a bizarre figure outlined. It was one of the vergers in a soiled violet cassock, his hardened, hideous face pitted by small-pox. There were few sins in life of which that face did not tell. Full of the self-importance of his position he looked disdainfully round and cleared his throat raucously as he propped himself against a great funnel that he had been dragging behind him, and gazed at the sky, imper-turbably sucking his teeth, like a singer awaiting the signal for the attack.

With a last reverberating volley the cannonade closed.

Some men standing in front of the dying bonfire pulled a few logs out of the charred embers. It became oppressively still as a hoarse, rusty voice spoke from the Campanile, and the twelve strokes of midnight rolled over the town. The gas-lights were temporarily extinguished, and the three hundred and fifty arms of the candelabra grew dark, only the flickering of a few dying candles and the glow from the scattered remnant of the fire glimmered through the darkness.

The man with the soiled violet cassock and evil-smirched face came forward to the balustrade and howled through his megaphone:

Il carnevale è andato.

This harsh voice and unpicturesque blasé announcement that Ash Wednesday had come fell like a blow upon the crowd. Here and there a woman gasped, the sound distinctly audible in the sudden stillness and darkness.

As the normal gaslights of the night were rekindled, thousands thronged into the church, where at the stroke of twelve the litanies of Lent began.

The Maestro took his friend's arm, and they silently descended the steps from the gallery together.

6

When, after hours of search, Carvagno saw his wife before the Church of St. Mark, a strange timidity restrained him from calling to her.

He had, in the last years, so estranged himself from Bianca that now her appearance, as she stood cloaked and veiled before the entrance steps, filled him with sudden inexplicable diffidence.

He watched her follow the two men and disappear into the gallery. He tried to follow, but he had no card of admission and, with his upturned collar, he did not impress the attendant, who refused to let him pass up. He made no further attempt to gain entrance to the terrace, but composed himself to wait below for Bianca's appearance.

The clamour of the Carnival surged round him unheeded. A forgotten door re-opened in the doctor's life and he trembled under the onslaught of a feeling which he could not understand.

Ten years before he had found this strong, handsome girl in Portoguaro and married her. His fierce, egotistic passion had soon subsided. Its satisfaction had left him free and reinforced for his work and he immersed himself in the task of hospital organization which consumed him completely. He had no time for women, he must succour the poor.

Bianca was there, she filled a need, but she was not, for him, an individual; there was no room in his hurried, overfilled day for comradeship. At times compunction smote him, but the press of duty soon wiped out all other thoughts. There were hours in which he realized dimly as she sat beside him in her calm remoteness that he no longer filled her life. And in their intimacy he began to feel uneasy and abashed. But he had no time to analyse his feelings, all that interfered with his work must be set aside. Bianca heard this maxim so often that she began to feel as if she were somehow to blame, and to believe that a doctor must not be expected to have any life apart from his profession and his practice.

But the logic of facts was not to be so easily glossed over. Carvagno knew that a strong nature stood there by his side which was not stifled by the exigencies of his work and did not adapt itself to them. His consciousness of it had increased with time, and partly from cowardice and partly from a sense of guilt, he had grown to avoid his wife's company.

His professional sympathies, the fierce impersonal war he waged upon the afflictions of his patients, and his passion for administration, left him no strength for the exacting demands of human relationships. And so for the last two years he had begun to shun Bianca's eye. He had not the strength to break through this tacit antagonism and begin anew.

All the glamour that had surrounded him in her eyes during the first years faded, and Bianca's life became dark and unfriended; she went her way depending upon no one. He no longer knew her and he dreaded what he might learn. In the first months of her pregnancy he had several times tried to show tenderness and solicitude, but she was now doubly remote, mysterious and terrible to him.

He did not question or watch her. He could not feel jealousy, for a tie must exist before the fear that it may be broken can arise. This woman with the tragic Roman face had grown into something higher than himself that

oppressed him by its inscrutability. He did not know the laws she obeyed, her thoughts or her desires.

They never spoke of the child.

He had no inkling of any means by which he could give her pleasure. And hence she was the only being that, unconsciously to herself, had power over him. She was like a priestess to him, a vestal guarding her mystery, that even in death she would not reveal.

But to recognize all this clearly, as we have said, he had neither the time nor the inclination. He was glad that Bianca had made friends with a few young people. Perhaps he was glad of it, because, in a way, it put her a little in the wrong. He shook off all this vague self-reproach and set up for himself quarters in the hospital where he could sleep.

Then, with Bianca's illness came the turning point. As she lay back, pale and unconscious on the pillows, the memory of his love awoke again.

Once established, the tie between man and wife is not to be broken. Not their visible selves alone, but their invisible beings are one. However fate may drive them apart, may transform them into enemies, that ineradicable consciousness has but to be evoked and again they know that each belongs to the other. There are moments of crisis in which we emerge from the stream of mortal existence and look for an instant, unconditioned, upon life.

As she lay unconscious Carvagno saw again the girl he had loved and forgotten. She wore again the look he knew, it even seemed as if he had never seen it until then.

As he left the empty room from which she had escaped, ashamed and at his wits' end, his love, that had been so soon forgotten, reawakened. And from that hour it did not sleep again.

The crowd wedged against the steps of the Basilica, left the colonnade empty, and its mosaic shimmered in the unaccustomed light. In this open space the doctor paced up and down. For the first time in his life he felt welling within him that half physical, half spiritual emotion that we call regret. What he had to regret he did not know. Sweat came on his forehead, every pore in his skin, every hair on his body was stirred.

Just then the cart in which the Carnival king had been paraded round the square came to a stop and the crowd, bursting through the thin line of police, swarmed over the empty space. And at that moment Bianca reappeared. Again the doctor felt that strange timidity, which prevented him from calling to his wife. She walked on heavily, a little stiffly; for the first time, so it seemed to Carvagno, the signs of her condition were patent. She went on through the crowd as if there were no obstacle in her path, and it was only with the utmost watchfulness that Carvagno could keep her in sight. She left the square and entered the dark streets; he could not guess at her destination. She did not seem to feel herself followed, never hastening her steps but walking with a steady monotonous tread that vaguely disquieted him. Her way through the streets became more and more labyrinthine; Carvagno felt that she was returning to some appointed apot.

Across squares and bridges the way led, through silent places that betrayed no sign of the wildness reigning on the Piazza. The days were gone in which the Carnival had filled all the streets, and there had been no doorway that did not shelter some riotous pair, no palace window behind which the golden flagons had not been ranged.

It was with dulled and confused senses that Bianca took her way through these dark streets in the dead of night. Where a wide street opened on to a canal, she stood still and waited for the steam-boat. The night tide was high and washed the wooden landing stage rhythmically—the eternal rhythm of the city.

The woman threw back her veil and drew a long heavy breath like a sleeper. She stood motionless upon the stage and seemed to be soothed by the maternal murmur of the water. The thundering of distant guns, the lightning of a distant

storm, disturbed her not at all. She had no other object than to endure, to see whether this night would ever come to morning.

She wavered hither and thither before the doctor's eyes upon the wavering bridge, and the sight was more poignant to him than all that had gone before. Torn with fierce love and pity he went to her, hardly conscious of what he did, and bending low over her hand as if he dared not show his face, he began to speak in words he had not chosen, as if some spirit had taken possession of him and acted through him. The betrayed husband humbled himself before his wife.

"My Bianca ! Life is cruel. Whatever has come, the blame is mine. I was cold. I was a coward. I did not love you enough. All the guilt is mine whatever may have happened. Speak to me, break this terrible silence that you have kept since Sunday. Speak to me, for the fault is mine. Speak to me, for I love you, I long for you."

On Bianca's face there was no sign of fear or of astonishment. Calmly, in a musical voice, she uttered the word, "Come."

A gondola carried the pair to their home.

7

At the close of Carnival day, some minutes after midnight, an accident happened which reduced part of the centenarian's collection to ashes. Gritti had returned with François from the opera. To-night, as on every night, he made a tour of the gallery containing his treasures. A young servant, the same boy who slept in his room, went first into each room with a taper mounted on a stick to light the candles. In the hall where the theatre programmes were collected he handled his light so awkwardly that a burning candle fell on the frame of one of the sheets. The boy tried to recover it by means of his torch and the thin wood flared up. The flames soon caught the paper beneath.

As the unfortunate boy tore wildly at the burning paper, flaming pieces went flying and kindled two other sheets that were not under glass. In a few seconds the vision that the Maestro had seen in this place became a reality.

The room filled with flames, black clouds of smoke burst from the windows, the heat was intense. In the twinkling of an eye, the accumulated wastepaper of a lifetime was whirling to destruction.

The centenarian stood staring helplessly as if he felt neither the danger, the heat nor the smoke, till his servant dragged him back into the next room, whence he continued to stare blankly.

Seeing the flames, all the servants of the house and a number of neighbours hurried to the fire. Buckets of water swished enthusiastically over the bubbling, hissing mass that subsided with a crackling round of applause. Their well-meant efforts were wasted. There was no possibility of saving paper and wooden frames from fire, and no other serious danger existed, for the hall contained no curtains and the vaulted roof and the floor were both of stone. In a quarter of an hour the thousand mementos of a thousand operas were destroyed, and the perplexed rescuers stood helpless in the middle of a blackened room full of cinders, smell, and flying scraps of charred paper.

The centenarian watched the destruction of his treasures, standing perfectly still as if he could not comprehend the disaster. Even the ever-moving bird-like eyes and the working throat were motionless in this crisis. But when the last flame died away and the grey clouds of smoke rolled to the ceiling, a frenzy of rage, such as he had not known in the last ten years, seized him. Under the lash of this rage the mechanical figure became suddenly human. His high, toneless voice screamed out angry curses in every European language and, stamping over to the unfortunate torchbearer, he belaboured him with the ebony staff. His strength in avenging the loss of his treasures was incredible, and as he chased the band of domestics before him his breath did not fail nor his muscles weaken.

He had nothing in the world but his hobby, and the ghastly fate that had overtaken it had conquered his automatism and brought back the power of feeling to this body that had long laid aside every living emotion. But would the life reawakened in this machine which had held it enchained, seize the opportunity to make its escape?

The fury of Andrea Gritti raged unabated. Throwing his staff to the wall he seized with his mouldering, but still tenacious hands, upon the throat of the boy, who sank terrified to the floor. Then as if he had forgotten the cause of his rage he began to shriek into the air:

"*Crapule! Canaille!* Jacobins! Traitors! Rebels!"

He stamped on the floor, raving in the language of a forgotten political era. Then a word from François tamed the Marchese. The frail old serving man went up to him and, deathly pale, looked him in the eyes as he said only:

"Excellency!"

The centenarian's manner changed immediately, his fingers went to his pulse, and as he counted he sank into a chair.

Ah! This outburst was a trap that Death had laid for him. Irreplaceable life force, heart beats and breathing enough for three years had been wasted. A sudden vertigo, a cold and deathly faintness seized him.

He closed his eyes and mentally called up all the forces of his will to resist the onset of death and carry him over the fatal moment. A quarter of an hour later he knew that he had won the battle. Still his constitution had suffered terrible damage. It would take many days of carefully calculated effort to readjust the balance. And he must not let himself think of his loss. He must win the great bet that he laid against life, God and the devil. There must be no more sentimentality. All that was human must go. No, he had not lost the wager yet.

Marchese Gritti gave orders in his clear, inhuman voice that the burnt-out room was to be locked up as it was and the key brought to him. Then he made François rub his body with alcohol. An hour later he felt that he had driven the last threatening shadow round the last corner.

Thus the centenarian, too, paid his tribute to the fires of Carnival.

8

"Ah me! Born in poverty in the wretchedest of villages, what chance had I of gaining the least enlightenment? A miserable spinet came under my hands and very soon I had determined to write music. Note upon note, nothing but notes! That is all my history. And the sad thing is that now, in my old age, I begin to fear that all these notes are worthless.

"What regret, what despair, for me! Fortunately at my years there is but little time left for despair."—*From a letter of Verdi to a woman friend, quoted by C. Bragagnolo.*

Slowly, through the still thronging people, the two friends traversed the Riva. Many masked men were now leaving the crowd, but they seemed to shiver a little, to have tired of their costume and feel ashamed of it now that they were in the open streets. The fireworks had exhausted the last remnants of their high spirits and they were hurrying as fast as possible out of the depressing atmosphere.

An extra boat was leaving San Zaccaria to take passengers down the canal, and the Maestro accompanied the Senator upon the crowded landing stage. Shouting and pushing, the flood of passengers thronged on board. The Senator disappeared among the people. Foam splashed from the wheel as the steamer moved away from the pontoon, breathing out clouds of smoke. Under the coloured lantern the masked passengers stood a little apart from the folk in ordinary dress, an unhappy, anachronistic little group on the smoky, whistling steamboat.

Beppo, who was waiting up for his master, had as usual lighted a fire in the room. The Maestro sent him to bed.

When he was alone, Verdi uttered a sigh of relief, like one who has had to

dissemble his feelings for hours. The episode of Wagner and the Aïda pot-pourri was uppermost and galling in his mind. He shivered with the discomfort of his thoughts. It seemed to him as if his pride had never been so keenly wounded as in that moment when he had felt so eager for the recognition of the foreigner. Wagner had dismissed his finest work with an unceremonious wave of the hand. Yet he did not feel the least desire to defend his work or to blame his adversary. The unhesitating, disquieting opinion formed itself in his mind: "The verdict was a hard one, but the German was right. The time is past. It is enough."

Sunk in himself, Verdi stood in the middle of the room. No one knew the truth better than he. These forty years of gigantic labour had been spent in a lost cause. For opera, the music that was in his blood, was a lost cause. His nerves were shattered by the hopeless struggle, his strength exhausted by the heavy task, but there was no one to recognize it, no one knew it. His victories had only served to cover his retreat. He had been driven from position to position; Nabucco and I Lombardi that had at first created an unheard-of *furore* had soon been thrown impatiently aside.

Then, in a new style, Ernani had appeared. This opera was a success, the sort of success at which the more enlightened laugh. Like an infuriated animal he had gone on turning out two operas a year, in his search for the right method. Macbeth came. The Italian public rejected it as revolutionary and unintelligible, and the Parisian critics damned it as worn-out rubbish. He came into the field again with Legnano. It should be such a thing as the world had never heard—the thunder song of freedom. It perished in the enthusiasm of its first night. Louisa Miller followed, its complete opposite, full of intimate, mournful melodies. It was played now once a year by greasy third-rate companies.

Forward still without pause! The elusive true mode was caught at last! Rigoletto, Trovatore, Traviata, were composed in two or three years. Hope soared, at last he had touched the goal. To-day these were but the still breathing relics of a dead thing.

Again he essayed a new course—the Vespers, Boccanegra, the Masked Ball. One or other might still be found on the rubbish heaps of discarded artistic fashions.

On once more: Don Carlos. What a thousand-fold care, what inflexible determination, were lavished on that giant work, in which no single empty measure, no faintest trace of slackness should be allowed to stand. A hundred nights of labour it had cost him from sunset to the glimmering Parisian dawn.

And the result? For the first time the papers and foyer critics began to hiss, to sneer: Wagner-imitation! Every technical *nuance*, every harmonic embellishment, was labelled "Wagner," although not a single note of the German's work was known to him.

And at the last Aïda—his final, mighty sally from the beleaguered fort. Wagner had derided it. He had belittled it. Scorning all law, he was bidding for the applause of the moderns. Born in a country where no festival, no carnival was known, to which therefore the essential nature of opera was strange—he still dared to sneer and gibe at what he could not understand. Had not Boito quoted some phrase of his in which he said that *Andante* was the *tempo* of German music—steady measured movement?

But *Andante* and opera were poles apart in spirit, the *tempo* of opera was all fire and restlessness. Well, *Andante* had won. The youth of Italy willed it so. The Lyceums and the Conservatoriums were turning out hundreds of composers who no longer wrote opera, but German chamber music and piano music. Many of them, out of a lingering respect, sent him their work. There were gifted men among them—Sgambati, for instance, and Bossi. But where were they driving him, with their elaborate dissonant vanities? Whither? They had no inkling of who he really was—the last of the Italians. He began to understand the Senator's pessimism. His generation had been the Thermopylæ of Italy. The greedy, man-eating century was devouring him now.

He threw a glance at the pile of his operas which his friend had caused to be placed in his room. They lay close packed upon the bookstand, in their various bindings. He recalled some musical statistics he had read, to the effect that out of the five hundred and thirty-four operas produced in Italy during the first thirty years of his career, not more than twenty had survived, and that twelve of the twenty were his own—two-thirds of the whole. But was that true? Had Nabucco survived? No, no! He had fought in a lost cause.

Who realized now with what courage, what fire and cunning, he had struggled to rescue the soul of Italian music—Italy's own peculiar art form—from a time and a people that were its deadly enemies, to whom their own joy, the expression of their own nature, had become an object of suspicion? Ten times he had succeeded. The eleventh, no. The old campaigner was worsted at last. He must give up his sword.

Hardly knowing what he did, the Maestro went to the cabinet into which he had locked the Wagner music. He took the key from his pocket and threw the lid open as if he would say, "There, you are free!" He did not touch Tristan, however, but turned again to the table where the great sheaf of the Lear music lay.

He had been brought to this haunted Venice as into a mountain, to endure the last temptation.

Involuntarily his hand strayed among the leaves, and it lighted upon a sheet on which he had scribbled some thoughts. He read:

"If my house were burning and I knew that the being dearest of all the world to me was lying there in danger, would I stop the firemen hurrying to the rescue to give them a long confused description of the position of the room? No, I would call to them, briefly and clearly, what was necessary to let them understand, to leave them in no doubt. That is all that Art can do. It is only a cry of encouragement to the heart. Would a real cry of help try to perplex, to conceal its plain meaning? No, no! Such cries are not the voice of real necessity."

And beneath he had written: "Confusion, confusion, all is confusion. Nothing is real to them."

Then in the stern justice of his heart, the Maestro had added:

"I, too, am in confusion. This is not the voice of necessity, but of uncertainty. I, too, am in perplexity."

Not once did he glance at the sheets that represented the thought of half a lifetime, the labour of ten years. Not once did he scan again the mass of phrases, themes and passages, of chorales and finales, of martial and funeral marches, duets, terzettes, quartettes, arias and dirges. Sharp and clear came the verdict: "This is a failure. A hotch-potch. It is no use."

The Maestro looked again at the open cabinet, and dumbly made an ironic bow to Tristan, as if saying:

"Richard Wagner! I will not disgrace myself! I will die the old opera composer."

A sick, blurred vision rose before him of the violet-gowned sacristan shouting across the square his stentorian "The Carnival is over." A foghorn. Outside a ship came from Giudecca harbour and stood out over the lagoon in the darkness.

Suddenly Verdi seized the portfolio with both hands and threw King Lear upon the fire. But some devilish marplot power must interfere to spoil the completeness of the act. Several pages flew out and strewed the floor. It was almost too much. With half-closed eyes the Maestro bent, and gathering them together, crammed them on the heap.

The early hours of Ash Wednesday had dimmed the fire. Its thin, pale tongues licked the edges of the thick paper as the beasts in the Roman circus played with doomed slave and Christian before the final onslaught.

With bitterness and horror in his heart, the Maestro had to take the tongs and help the flames to catch. They flickered over the pages, lighting up the

lines, before they blackened and destroyed them. Another and still another escaping sheet must be thrust back into the fire. It seemed an endless time before the ghastly rite was over and the destruction was complete.

He sank into a chair. Why he had done this thing he could not tell. Of all the acts to which he had been moved against his will, this was the strangest, the most horrible and most insane. It had wiped out the harvest of many unproductive years, of many weary, sleepless nights, of ceaseless industry that had robbed life of all joy, of an endless alternation of enthusiasm and despair, and utterly despoiled his life. The fire had swept the years and left them empty. It was hours before the Maestro came to himself. His careful, orderly nature could not grasp what he had done. He, who hardly allowed a hair to be wasted on his estate, whom no publisher or agent could cheat, had with his own hand destroyed his own chief asset.

Not until morning did he rouse himself from his stupor. Then peace fell on him—the peace of self-renunciation. And the peace was followed by a strange languid satisfaction—the satisfaction of an accomplished sacrifice.

When Beppo came into the room in the morning the Maestro gave him the order to pack his boxes. Then he bethought himself and put off his departure.

9.

"All that is being produced now is the product of mental anguish."—*From a letter of Verdi to Clarina Massei.*

So ended the history of the opera "King Lear" which periodically occupied the attention of the European press during Giuseppe Verdi's life as well as after his death. Although by the terms of the Maestro's will all the musical work which he left behind, in so far as it had not already been burnt by himself, was to be completely destroyed, rumour could not let this unpublished work rest. Affirmations were constantly made regarding it, but no one, either out of pity for the dead or concern for the rights of the living, ever actually brought it to the light.

For several years all sorts of reports and conjectures had been afloat, particularly concerning the libretto, which, it was said, Verdi had written with his own hand.

Nobody, however, could discover the whereabouts of this manuscript, which had fortunately escaped the flames that consumed the six hundred sheets containing the music of the opera in Venice on the night between the sixth and the seventh of February.

The reader who wishes to verify the facts of this story, will find them in a correspondence which extended over some thirty years, in the course of which the opera was referred to from time to time. The first letter, dated from Busseto in February, 1850, gives Cammarano the younger (who wrote the text of Trovatore) a complete and concise summary of an admirable scenario. As usual, the Maestro supplied all his own material and only the verse-making was left to the poet.

Three years later the work was taken from Cammarano and placed in the hands of the better known litterateur Antonio Somma. Over the collaboration with Somma a protracted exchange of letters took place, which for Verdi were remarkably full and explanatory. Thirty years later the last mention of "Lear" is found in a letter from the Maestro to his friend Domenico Morelli, the painter.

Verdi seldom or never spoke of unpublished work. There is only one reference on record to "King Lear." During the first year of its inception, the Maestro wrote in a moment of enthusiasm:

"There are some very fine numbers in this opera, particularly the reconciliation duet between Lear and Cordelia."

Strangely enough it was this duet of which the Maestro thought so highly, that caused the Senator so much heart-burning.

Everything seems to indicate that Lear was complete to the last instrumental part and the final polishing of the stage directions, and that many of the numbers and pieces even existed in several different versions. Since the time of Aïda, the Maestro had been putting more and more work into his operas and most of the scenes were remodelled two or three times.

Several writers and historians assert that many phrases and themes from Othello and Falstaff were repeated in Lear. Some acute psychologists even declare that Verdi ordered his musical remains to be destroyed so that this derivation should not be discovered. Petty souls! The Maestro put more of himself into Lear than into any of his other operas.

If it is true that the sources from which he drew his inspiration and his material were not inexhaustible, were limited even, it is also certain that he exercised the keenest and most constant watchfulness to prevent any repetition or even reminiscence of earlier work from creeping into the later operas.

On the night of the Venetian Carnival, he made an act of renunciation which amounted to artistic suicide. It must have seemed to him the end of his career—how could it be otherwise in a man of his years? And how bitter for one so continuously successful as he had hitherto been was this knowledge, that his adversary, Richard Wagner, who had vanquished him, was still living and writing, still conquering and thrusting him deeper among the shades of dead and forgotten artists.

It was the bitterest act of self-renunciation that ever a human heart had made. But the demoniacal principle that guides human destiny with the rod of inevitable necessity overruled his decision.

CHAPTER IX

THE POWER OF DESTINY

1

On the night of the Carnival, Italo and Margherita Dezorzi became lovers. Rather, Italo became her lover. To her, still deeply sunk in her impersonation of the fainting Eurydice following her deliverer through the darkness, their love was but part of the rôle into which she had thrown herself with all her being. He was the necessary partner of the scene, and as long as she continued to play the rôle she accepted him unhesitatingly.

Love, as a personal experience, could not touch the Dezorzi. There were but two elements in her nature—a rare, highly organized intelligence and an unwavering histrionic impulse that ruled her personal as well as her professional life. Like the lemur, that, robbed of its borrowed form, fades into nothingness, she could only experience life through some form of expression, a rôle or a disguise.

This impulse to represent something which was not herself was more than her art—it was the condition of her existence. But from it her art derived a power and a unity which, coupled with the charm of her appearance, had enabled her to achieve a reputation far beyond her years.

Who her real self was, Margherita did not know. For several years she had concealed, like a shameful secret, the knowledge which a visit to a doctor had revealed, that by a rare, and in her case, congenital defect, she was debarred from motherhood. Margherita was dimly conscious that her talent and her character were influenced largely by this calamity. So deep and incommunicable was the shame with which her secret filled her that she had never confided it even to her mother.

Consumed by this consciousness she sought happiness in a hundred ways, but found herself limited to the short-lived satisfactions of her insatiable vanity. And it was that consciousness, destructive of all capacity for natural experience, that stood like a spectre between the lovers.

She was beautiful, although her face bore the mark of bitter thoughts, and the lines of her figure possessed the almost unearthly grace that had affected Italo so poignantly on the first evening at Balbi's.

The only joy that this unhappy creature knew lay in the reflection of herself that she beheld in the effect she produced upon others. And, strangely, the more she saw of these mirrored selves, the nearer to reality did she feel her own shadowy being drawn.

Woman she was not, nor maiden. Her lust for recognition and effect, coupled with keen, masculine intelligence, had led her to become an actress and enabled her to create a career for herself. Never, in any cause nor for any person, losing sight of herself, and unhampered by the weaknesses of other women, she was destined to succeed in achieving international fame on the metropolitan operatic stage before her thirtieth year. In Italo's love for her she found such a mirror as her nature required, the strongest and most beautiful she had known. At first he had produced no effect upon her, nor seemed to her in any way noteworthy, but when in a moment of remorseful self-torture he had told her the story of Bianca, her interest and her enmity were aroused. She hated this woman whom nature had not cursed.

The Eurydice tableau proved decisive. She was intelligent enough to realize that the Count's idea of elaborately reconstructing an old scene was impracticable, that it would only appeal to dilettante or scholarly minds and would certainly not be understood by any of the people on the Piazza. Still she consented, for she never refused any truly dramatic rôle, even a thankless one.

So she acted, she became, Eurydice. She gave no thought to the ignorant audience, incapable of understanding her. It did not exist for her. Orpheus was her public, whose hand trembled, whose voice failed with adoration. It was a new form of success for Margherita, keener in its charm than any the stage afforded. She had for partner no indifferent, stumbling colleague who would change again into an uninteresting object as soon as they left the stage, but Orpheus the Deliverer himself. And, exalted by this good fortune, she was an ardent Eurydice to him.

When they returned together after the stroke of midnight to the Dezorzi's home, the complaisant mother, who seemed to have such a respect for her daughter that she never opened her mouth in her presence, had already gone to bed.

In the carelessly furnished room whose walls were covered with signed photographs, Eurydice stood with closed eyes before Orpheus, a tall figure in her peplos-like draperies and high gold-spangled cothurnus sandals. Her hair, bound with the silver fillet, drooped upon her neck. Italo was but a breath of adoration. In her ecstasy Eurydice allowed no trace of Margherita to appear, she lingered in the underworld as if she dreaded the hour of waking; with a dim smile she took a blind step forwards and drawing the charmed Orpheus to her with frail arms she lightly stroked his lips.

"Now, my Orpheus, you must go."

"Go ?" echoed Italo.

She did not open her eyes.

"Yes, go ! Back to the world."

"I—Margherita, I cannot go. . . ."

His teeth rasped like chalk upon a blackboard. Eurydice insisted:

"You must go ! Did you not tell me of a woman whom you love, who loves you . . . somewhere ? What was she called ? Down here we forget so soon."

"Bianca ? There is no Bianca."

"But think how long she must have suffered from your unfaithfulness. She was a stupid, clumsy creature, your poor Bianca, was she not ?"

"I know. And I am a thousand times more unworthy to dare to come near to you, to come . . ."

"She will certainly have been watching on the Piazza to-night, this creature, in the front row. . . ."

"Why do you torment me like this ?"

"So as to leave you free to go to her, my Orpheus ! There is nothing to hinder you. You have been false to her, but you have not betrayed her in deed. She will forgive you. Be a man, call up your courage, dare all and go to her! Go!"

"I have forgotten her. I have forgotten all. I live only in you."

"You love me ? Me ? But she is a woman, she is alive, she can feel and suffer. She has your child. But I, I am one whom none can love. She is a woman, but I—love may not come to me."

"You kill me when you speak so, my beloved."

"I am a shadow, my Orpheus."

"Ah, do not act any longer, do not act. . . ."

"There is less acting than you think. I *am* Eurydice and live with death. Nothing is real to me—to-day, to-morrow, all time is one to me. Shadows have no memory. You must remember that, my Orpheus."

"To-morrow—when is to-morrow ?"

Italo knew such joy as he had never dreamed—the phantom-strange kisses of a being to whose genius all knowledge is given, to whom nothing is denied save life. To his young fervour, the cold fantasy seemed more entrancing than any reality. To his simplicity it was all convincing. The trembling body of Eurydice, her deep, sobbing breath, the arms that drew him to her and slowly released him again, the flying kiss that sighed upon his lips, the sobbing shock with which his tongue found hers.

The calm, unwinking eyes of Margherita's mind knew the joy of beholding her own power to which every motion of the young man bore witness. With the joy of the true artist who sees his creation live before him, she saw her own perfect rendering of Eurydice. With mingled tears of true and feigned emotion the actors played their drama to its end.

Italo felt that he had never lived till now. Beside this, the simple love of the peasant woman was a mere means to motherhood. The mystery of Venice was unveiled to him, the city of waters and of love. Was not this house, was not every house, a ship rocked on an unceasing tide of night in the very rhythm of love, that, out of love's last ecstasy, brought sleep at last ? Not the sleep of insensibility, but the unloosing of consciousness in the slow eurythmic pulse of gliding weariness, long, short ! long, short ! Raised upon their thousand pales the houses throng. And round them flows the lullaby of the waters drawn by the plucking fingers of the earth from the age-old, ceaselessly vibrating strings of a giant harp. Many days of foolhardy battle has that race of seamen survived, but ever with night comes the spell of music and of love and of sleep that falls at last upon the weary limbs of lovers.

Italo slept.

Waking, he rose with a strange look at her rose-tinted sleep and left the singer alone.

2

"Here I might insert still another striking protest which Wagner made against superficial and frivolous criticism of Italian music : 'The long-drawn-out melodic form which Italian opera composers employ could not possibly have been derived from German musical drama ; it could have originated nowhere but in Italy.

" 'Auber, Boieldieu and myself have all learnt much from it. The final chorus

in the first act of Lohengrin derives far more from Spontini than from Weber. From Bellini, too, one may learn what melody is.' "—*Recollections of Richard Wagner, by H. von Wolzogen.*

Until this time Italo had still believed that the way was open for his return to Bianca. Now all was over. He must disappear from Bianca's world for ever.

All that was left for him was to avoid being alone with his own thoughts for a moment, to press every drop of joy out of the present, and to wait blindly for what might come.

After she had laid aside the costume of Eurydice, Italo hardly saw Margherita again. She was as formal as if nothing had taken place between them and drew back coldly when he tried to approach her. As in a delirium, he neither slept nor woke, but waited.

He spent the following morning in the Rossini theatre where the final rehearsal of "The Power of Destiny" was being held. The Dezorzi did not appear to notice that he was there. The theatre was her only reality, all else was a dream which served to pass the time.

She was more than the Diva, the leading actress in this company, she was its *spiritus rector*. Conductor and stage management alike consulted her judgmnet and constantly adopted the ideas which she supplied.

Her ambition was to create out of the most hackneyed and banal Italian operas, which she had chosen for her field, something new and unusual. She was content, in order to do this, to accept parts for herself that were inferior and thankless, for she was interested not in music and acting alone, but had a thorough understanding of *mise en scène* and knew how to subordinate her own part to the harmony of the whole. Though hardly yet in her middle twenties she had attained a position of such authority that older singers who had already made good deferred to her. In rehearsal all her unreality fell away, and she became the creative artist, competent and unaffected.

Italo was unfortunate with women. He was attracted always to those who were so much stronger than he that they overshadowed his nature and his talents. Weighed down by his recognition of the greatness of the genius of Margherita Dezorzi, he left the theatre without attempting to take leave of her.

Coming out into the Merceria San Salvador, he stood still irresolutely and the idol whom his heart had neglected in all the mingled experiences of the past week came down the street alone.

Wagner was engaged in his usual monologue. Venice seemed to have filled out his slight figure, and in his short coat, carrying his hat in his hand, he gave at the first glance the impression of a seafaring man. He walked with a firm tread and muscular action, and at each step he seemed to seize upon the space he had conquered—a chosen spirit this, whom nothing could withstand.

He answered Italo's reverential salute with a beckoning nod. He had spent the whole morning alone, meditating and jotting down philosophic reflections, and his mind was ready for unburdening. He was glad to see someone whose face he remembered although he did not recall the name. No matter who he might be, he would serve. Dumb and overwhelmed by his good fortune, Italo went up to the great man, bowing.

Wagner put aside the argument which he had just brought to a successful conclusion and turned, smiling, to a new subject.

"You are an Italian? I had an amusing encounter with some friends last night, several of them countrymen of yours."

Italo inclined his head a little in a respectful question, but avoided looking directly into the great man's face.

"I was maintaining something that they were not willing to admit. Why, I don't know. There's nothing but misunderstanding in this world. I have found that out often enough. And the dogmatists are hardest of all to convince."

Italo inclined his head. Wagner stopped short to elaborate his theme.

"We were arguing once more about Italian opera. My Italian friends were in great form, and I'm afraid I got angry at the rubbish they were talking. Yes, there's no denying it, I lost my temper."

They went on a few steps and Wagner again pulled up in front of the Goldini Theatre.

"There can be no doubt that in the 'thirties, when Rossini decided to write no more, melodramatic music was on its last legs. Something new was awaited, something real, and it came. But what does the youth of to-day know of the treasure, the real musical treasure, that lies in the old operas? Frivolous as it was, Rossini's music was worthy of respect and I have not hesitated to say so publicly. I never decried him. The typical crescendo for which he is famous is a real achievement in dramatic music. Beethoven said very truly that Fortune had endowed him with the loveliest melodies in the world. And I realize to-day the power and genius that went to the composition of *Il Barbiere*."

Italo raised his head and looked in astonishment at the Master, who smiled at him amicably:

"Yes, *caro amico*, and gentlemen all! When you compose music, give all the new artistic tricks the go-by: the over-worked triad and all the rest of the emotional effects. The twilight of the orchestra is falling."

Italo's heart swelled with pride. The Master took him for a composer. In the Calle del Fabri, Wagner came to a standstill again.

"These secondary questions are given far too much attention. You may hardly believe it, but I myself was quite mad on Italian melody in my youth. It was my musical first love. There was an early opera of mine—dead now, or interdicted rather—which was a perfect orgy of Belliniatry. I was twenty at the time, naturally. And to-day, after all those years, I am coming back to where I stood at the beginning. That is a very strange fact. But a man's development is always a development towards reaction. If I were to write another opera, it would consist of suites even more transparent than those of Parsifal. As I often say, Bellini, in spite of all the shallowness of his work, was the father of the lingering, soaring opera melody which is, after all, the only form for dramatic music. I have much to thank him and Spontini for myself. You can trace the influence of that splendid fighting fool, Spontini, in the joy chorus of Lohengrin."

A noisy group of people came between them, but as Italo returned to the Master's side, he saw that Wagner had gone on talking without noticing the interruption. He was finishing his speech.

"The newer Maestri are empty and meaningless, padded out with false pathos. But in spite of that: 'Go on, do better! Do better, Signori!' say I. That was what I said last night. A day or two before, in the Carnival I heard the band on the Piazza playing a fantasy out of a new opera. I had not heard it before, but it was true music. . . ."

Richard Wagner stopped short and turned pale. Ten steps in front of him he had caught sight of a butcher's shop with the halved bodies of animals hanging in rows from iron hooks. With distorted features, the Master waved a hasty farewell to Italo and turned hastily away, while the young man gazed after him in astonishment.

3

"I see that the papers are setting up a jubilant palaver. Heaven preserve us! Of all mad worlds this is the maddest! If we must make some concession to it, let's have the jubilee held for fifty days after my death."—*From a letter of Verdi to Giulio Ricordi.*

The Senator was a man of no great flexibility of mind, which is surprising in a philologist, a race that lives upon hypotheses and has to be agile in following

them. Rich in material things he was poor in discrimination and critical faculty. When he had once adopted an opinion, he followed it blindly without submitting it to any test. Of all the defects that hampered him in life, this was the worst, the cause of his career having been cut short so early.

Under the influence of his wine he had taken up the idea that the Maestro's depression, which he misunderstood and under-estimated, could be cured by the public triumph of his work, an ovation of popular applause. He was at first a little doubtful of the wisdom of the scheme, but in his muddle-headed way, he confused the Maestro's opinion of such an ovation with his own desire to see his friend's work honoured, and he forgot how strictly Verdi had forbidden him to mention his presence in Venice to anybody. The arguments which he held with himself on the subject distracted him more and more, he felt that something must be done, but what it should be was not clear.

His great fear was that the Maestro might leave Venice abruptly and upset his plans, which were growing dearer to him every day.

Just then something happened that astonished him. He had yielded at last to his son's pressure and went to the Maestro one morning with a request which he had little hope of seeing fulfilled. He begged his friend to promise to occupy a box at the theatre on the twelfth of February when The Power of Destiny was to be performed. The Maestro was not annoyed, but said a little doubtfully:

"Why do you want me to go to the theatre ? You know I don't care about it nowadays."

"My boy, Italo, who goes to the rehearsals every day, is never tired of telling me how wonderful this singer, the Dezorzi, is. I think myself you ought to see her. Perhaps she would make a good Cordelia for the first night of Lear. Come and see her, Verdi !"

"Well, the Dezorzi does interest me a good deal. If only she wasn't singing my music. And suppose I am noticed and recognized."

"Leave me to see to it that you will neither be seen nor recognized ! You will be quite alone in the big proscenium box. Even I won't come near you at all."

The Senator was the more urgent in his assurances that there was no danger of recognition in complying with his son's request because it was a real grief to him that Italo did not consider Verdi the greatest man in the world. The Maestro neither consented nor refused, but he made no arrangements for engaging the box.

The Senator's next move was to apply to the Syndicate of the City and ask the Mayor for an interview, which was accorded him.

4

A soft, admonitory voice called the Maestro back to the Fischböcks. He felt it to be a duty to concern himself in the fate of the young man, whose music seemed grotesque to him, but for whom, nevertheless, he felt a deep and inexplicable respect.

In a toy shop in the Campo San Lucca he bought a plaything for the boy and betook himself on foot with the unwieldy package under his arm to the Fondamento dei Tedeschi, where he found a gondola to carry him to the poor and dreary quarter Santa Catarina.

The Maestro found the pretty, silent child alone in the room, the door of which stood open, for the mother had only gone out for an instant on her household duties.

Moved beyond his power of control, he unpacked the toy—a carriage with coachman and horses—and laid it on the floor in front of Hans. The unwonted appearance of the expensive toy overawed the serious child, whose solemnity was more than the ordinary quietness of an only child living always in the

company of grown-up people. A quick rush of pity filled the Maestro's heart and he drew the boy to him. Every time the Maestro saw this child the painful, gnawing sense of loss which had been growing on him without reason during the past few years, awoke again. The man of sixty-nine was timid as the child, and a few monosyllabic words passed between them.

"Do you like it, Giovanni?"

"Yes."

"You can wind it up with this key and then it will run."

"Yes."

"Would you like to see a lovely big garden some day? There is a pond there with a boat on it."

"Is it your garden?"

"Yes, it's my garden. You must come and see me."

"Only if Mummy comes too."

The half-conscious wish to adopt the child, which he had hardly realized before, now started up clear and insistent in his mind. To have this boy always beside him, to hear his voice growing happier, would make the house live again. Nothing should be forbidden to him, even the tall glass doors of the workroom that stood in the garden he might open if he chose and the three dogs would rush in after him. But Peppina? Was not she, was he not himself, too old? Would the child be happy? How could one take him away from his parents, who were strangers to himself? They would not allow it. No, it was only another fond, hasty dream to be buried.

The Maestro looked round the room. It had quite a different, a barer and poorer look now than on the other day when the table had been set for him there. Even the little provincial window box with its flowers had disappeared.

Agatha came in and shook the visitor's hand. Again he felt a tacit appeal in the clasp of the work-roughened fingers. He looked into the young face with the smooth, straight hair, the high unlovely forehead, the wistful features and clear eyes, he saw in those eyes both a desire to reveal their secret, and the timidity that prevented the revelation.

She sat down opposite him, evidently finding it equally difficult to remain silent or to speak.

The Maestro asked after Mathias. Agatha twisted her fingers and did not look up as she answered in her northern accent with its broad, guttural vowels:

"My husband is not at all well. He doesn't know it himself, he won't know it. That is what is so terrible! He went out on the night of the Carnival procession and since then he has been very feverish, but he won't stay in the house, or lie in bed. I am in despair. You will see him for yourself. And then he has so many disappointments in these days."

"What does the doctor say?"

"We have not seen Dr. Carvagno for a long time. But I always felt that he was only trying to cheer me up."

Agatha gave a quick, short sigh as she spoke, and catching breath plaintively she added:

"I am really at my wits' end what to do for him now."

Something must be done here, and at once, but it puzzled the Maestro how to set about it. The greatest circumspection and delicacy would be required. It was impossible, horrible, to think of offering these proud creatures money.

Fischböck came in. He had altered terribly in the few days that had passed. The subtle malady that had been dormant for so many months seemed to have come into the open and burned in the sunken eyes that had grown so large, and in the whole face flecked with livid patches. Even the brow was somehow distorted like that of a blind person, and the formerly smooth hair straggled over it in untidy wisps. The whole countenance seemed broken up, the upper part fanatical and excited, the lower hard and constricted. He came forward to meet the Maestro with evident pleasure.

"It's splendid of you to come again, Herr Carrara, splendid! Believe me,

I've been longing to see you. I was afraid I had offended you, perhaps. It's always my luck. What a disagreeable fellow I must be ! But here you are !"

The young German continued to hold the hand of the other man as he went on:

"I've had nothing but misfortune these days. Everything goes wrong. Don't ask me about it, Herr Carrara, don't ask me. It's got to be. It's the price I have to pay for going my own way. Poor Agatha ! My brave little ally! Hold out a little longer!"

In the fever that possessed him he could not remain still for a moment. Agatha gazed at him, surprised to find that her distress had come into his thoughts. But the soft mood soon passed.

"I have no luck, not a spark of luck, in my work. All my expectations are knocked on the head. Good God ! What is luck anyhow but compromise with the world and its ways ? How could there be any chance for me ?"

The Maestro looked at this man who was so sure of his own inspiration, to whom his work seemed the greatest and finest thing in the world, although in reality it was only a few unintelligible pieces of piano music with antique titles that nobody would take seriously for a moment. And yet the clear-eyed and critical old man who had tossed aside piece after piece of his own, dissatisfied and disgusted, who three nights before had flung the whole gigantic score of Lear upon the fire, somehow believed in this youngster.

Fischböck's feverish excitement increased.

"I know, Herr Carrara, that you cannot yet begin to understand my music. But have patience ! Patience ! Trust me ! You have, I could swear it, the sense for true music. None of us can really hear the true melodies yet. But the more this senseless, vain, diseased, time-serving ego falls from me, the more I can feel and hear them flowing clear within me. Ah, no ! It is not these jigging, fleeting vanities which are called melody to-day that I hear, but the pure, selfless Melos—the law . . ."

Fischböck had to break off. His knees began to tremble so violently that his whole body was shaken. He stared out into space.

"What a martyrdom it is even to go across the street ! Everything that one sees is intolerable—all the brutish filth of modern life—soldiers, suffering animals, helpless, starving men, ragged children, coarse, self-indulgent or grasping, profit-seeking faces, debased women ! Ungoverned ! Lawless ! It sometimes seems as if there were nothing left for me but to throw myself in front of an express train. You know, Herr Carrara, many years ago we had a great poet in Germany who spent forty years of his life as a lunatic, but he was not mad, it was merely the effect of his intense clarity of soul in the midst of the modern tumult."

Fischböck stretched all his limbs as if throwing off a load.

"But a man can always die !"

At first the Maestro was shocked by the intolerance of Fischböck's words, although he knew that they were the ravings of a sick man. He told himself that they concealed only an overwhelming self-conceit, but at the same time they suggested a way of helping him. The misty, long-sighted blue eyes twinkled across their field of wrinkles.

"You are right, Fischböck, my friend ! I can't rise to the heights of your music. It is not given to me, unfortunately, to understand it. But old-fashioned as I am, I am convinced of one thing: that discord as well as concord may be a perfectly legitimate vehicle of music. It is only indolence on our part that refuses to admit more than a certain number of harmonic combinations to be musical and pleasing. It is quite conceivable that music is no more to be confined to what is pleasing to our aural limitations and requirements than it is to be confined to one school of composition. Theoretically I recognize this clearly, but personally I have not been able to rid myself of these limitations and requirements. Still, there are plenty of people more enlightened than I am. I know several such—I may even call them my friends—and, what is even more

convenient for our purpose, they possess a certain influence in the musical world. In a word, my dear Fischböck, I have shown your music to some of these friends of mine and asked for their opinion since I was unable to form one myself. Perhaps these progressive folk will be able to understand you. If so, we may be sure that everything will be done to make your work known."

The Maestro told this untruth without knowing at the moment how he was going to substantiate it. But he was very pleased with it, all the same, for he felt that it contained great possibilities. Once more he saw the effect of even a glimmering of hope upon the artist's contempt for fame and publicity. In a low, wistful voice Fischböck said:

"Is there really a chance of my things being printed?"

The Maestro quickly realized that he could have the music published at his own expense, and he said carelessly:

"Oh, yes! One of my friends is a publisher, and if his opinion should be favourable, there is certainly hope." Mathias Fischböck said nothing, his manner suddenly stiffened and became much less cordial than before in the effort to appear indifferent. It was an old experience of Verdi's to find that any kindness or assistance rendered to another was liable to be resented as an indication of superiority.

Mathias Fischböck's mouth was compressed in a thin line, and his manner became more and more harsh and unpleasant. An ungovernable desire to wound and insult this pompous, condescending Carrara swelled unreasoningly in his throat, and he muttered absurdly insulting phrases—the street-arab impudence that is the language of all impotent and irreverent youth.

For a moment the hard line that Sassaroli had seen there contracted the Maestro's brow. Then he realized the truth: he saw all the bitter, heart-hungry pride of youth, with its wild dreams of revolution, its pathetic enthusiasms and its angry impatience. It was all so human that Verdi began to laugh. His laughter was as unreasonable as Fischböck's indignation. He laughed ironically at first, then more good-humouredly, and in the end very heartily. Agatha laughed in sympathy, and Mathias, whom the sound of his own words had sobered, joined in uncertainly. Even the solemn child set up an unwonted gurgle of merriment, and Verdi lifted him up on his knee.

As he was leaving he became very emphatic.

"Now, Fischböck, you must stay in bed. You look wretchedly ill; you aren't fit to go out in that state. Promise me that you will not be so foolish as to get up till I come back, to-morrow or the day after."

Very unwillingly, in a subdued voice, Mathias gave the promise.

As the Maestro reached the bottom of the stairs that still smelt of new mortar, he heard a step behind him. Turning, he saw Frau Fischböck standing on the landing of the flight above. He waited for a moment thinking she had something to say to him, but she disappeared again quickly without speaking.

The same day the Maestro went to the Venetian branch of his bank and made arrangements for a considerable sum to be paid to him as soon as possible.

The peace that had descended on the Maestro after the destruction of King Lear soon passed. Despondency oppressed him, he had surrendered once more. And he could not, this time, draw the covering of oblivion over his head and forget as he had once been able to do. For the first time in his life he could not shake off the constant weariness that weighed upon him: a bodily sense of exhaustion as if from loss of blood, a mental homesickness, though for what harbour he longed he did not know. Had age claimed him at last?

Everything that had once revived his interest in life and put him at one with himself was now distasteful to him. He dreaded the return to Genoa, seeing Peppina again, meeting his friends. There was nobody to whom he could reveal himself. All that he had gone through in these last days was too sacred, too intimate, to be put into the unblushing language of ordinary conversation. He could not betray the fate of his burnt opera to anyone.

His ten years of mortal illness were over; there remained only the last agony, the waiting for death. And his hold on life was so tenacious, all his powers of resistance were so strong, that this last agony might be a long, long struggle.

Every creative moment in human life is a fusing of the rational faculties in man, a sudden subordinating of the controlled and mental element in his nature to the instinctive and involuntary. It is not given to men to create, they can only make discoveries. Composition is unreasoning. So is melody. They are, in their own realm, what the deeply buried sources of the waters are in the earth. Genius is the divining-rod by which at certain moments a human being can tap those secret springs. Nothing more.

There is no joy like the unfathomable rapture of such a moment, but what is there so bitter as for a man to feel himself impotent to attain it, unable to reach the primeval, unsubjected stream which once he had had the power to evoke? Like one from whom at the invasion of the male all sense of time and direction fades, to whom nothing is either near or far, above or beneath, so the Maestro moved in a void. The violent, scornful impact upon the simplicity of his nature of what the shrewd Filippo Filippi called "high art" had violated it profoundly. And the instrument of his subjection to this wounding and paralysing influence had been King Lear.

Like all the musicians of his day Giuseppe Verdi had been infected during the Lear period with the literary taint. The clear course of music had been clouded by this interruption even in his fresh and, at bottom, incorruptible mind. He had been concerned for the graphic effects of his orchestration more than for the flow of the pure stream of melody. The ambitious tendency of the time—"*l'art pour l'artiste*"—had had its effect, weakening the quality of his characteristic work.

The melody which he had once found in his heart had ceased to charm him; he had even come to look upon it as his enemy. No longer content to feel, he had been misled into trying to invent. And he had produced stiff symmetrical periods with the motives of finger exercises.

This derived work was now destroyed, and an unexpected result had followed. The old melodies and song that in Lear had been buried under a mass of musical writing began to come to life again. The Maestro put it down as a nervous derangement that portions of Traviata, Macbeth and Boccanegra floated through his mind at every hour of the day. They did not come to him as composition or as scenes, but only as melodies that seemed to use his mind as a thoroughfare —they came from elsewhere and passed on in their separate being. He never thought of them as having once been written by himself. They greeted him like strangers in the street, or soared past him in long, swallow-like flights, creatures that owed nothing to him and whom he scarcely recognized.

These fire-purged paths were new to him. The dust and sweat of the theatre, the din of human voices, were gone and he walked in them as in cleaner and clearer element.

He continued to take long tramps through the streets of Venice. Suddenly as he walked, the spacious inexhaustible melody of the Traviata love songs would begin to sing within him, and he would stand sitll under the spell with quick sobbing breath, marvelling at himself. What did it mean? But the experience only fed the strange homesickness that held him, for it reminded him of his loss.

It may have been this that helped him to decide, after much hesitation, to hear a few numbers from his *Forza del destino*.

About nine o'clock on the twelfth of February he entered the Rossini theatre. It recurred to him as he entered that in the days of Aïda he would not have suffered a performance of his work to be given in any theatre unless the caste had first been submitted to him and approved. He recalled his conflicts with the house of Ricordi when some impresario had not carried out his wishes. Not a note must sound that he had not fully authorized. What scheming and arguing! What guerilla war against the pig-headedness of the theatre staff,

against the waywardness of the singers and the greed of the management; and over the yearly renewal of agreements, what brain and nerve-racking arguments, for he would let nothing pass. From the first opera onwards he had had to defend his work against all its enemies at home and abroad. And so in his later years the earlier work became a continual burden to him, often driving him in disgust and self-loathing from his bed. There was hardly an opera which he had not at least tried to rewrite. He had no sin of omission on his conscience, for until a few years previously he had struggled unceasingly to improve his work.

This epoch was now over. For years he had polished and repolished his characters, guarding their footsteps like an anxious parent till they were grey-headed. But he no longer had the strength now, nor the desire; they must live and die as best they could.

His burning eagerness to hear his own music had died away. He went to this performance in the Rossini theatre only in order to spend the last evening of his stay in Venice neither alone nor in company, and so render it less intolerable. For he had resolved to return to-morrow. His eyes had been opened by his sojourn in Venice. The goal was reached. The recognition that all was over, which had not been possible in Genoa, which the companionship of his wife and the domesticity of his home on the second floor of the Palazzo Doria had constantly chased from him, was now arrived at in the loneliness of this strange city. The death of Lear was accomplished. There was nothing more to keep him in Venice.

He would utilize the next morning to secure, as far as possible, an improvement in the circumstances of the Fischböcks. If no better plan occurred to him, he intended to make over a considerable sum of money to them anonymously. It was annoying that everything came back to this wretched question of money. He could not see how he could arrange any artistic opportunities for Fischböck, but he was not at all clear as to what would happen on the morrow.

The second scene of the opera was just coming to an end as Verdi entered the proscenium box on the right-hand side of the theatre. He sat down on the little cushioned bench against the sloping left wall of the box. Although no one could possibly see him there even when the house was fully lighted, he could not feel at ease during the applause nor conquer a shamed feeling of self-exposure. With his first glance he took the measure of the conductor—a young baton-waving nonentity—and the orchestra, which was almost ludicrously small, three contrabasses, as many 'cellos and bass viols, a few violins and a minimum of wood and brass. The same musicians played on other nights in the large orchestra of La Fenice.

It was the old Italian penuriousness. The State would not grant subsidies, and theatre and orchestra were going to ruin. The Maestro felt as dissatisfied with the outcome of the revolution in musical matters as did the Senator in politics and in the business world. The spirit of the race that found its expression in *grandioso* and *furioso*, seemed to militate against any sequence or continuity of national life. It was the un-Italian talent for such sequence and continuity that Verdi had admired in the unpretentious character of Cavour, and the national hero Garibaldi himself—the flower of Italian earth—had also possessed it.

Garibaldi, the only Homeric figure of the nineteenth century, was a hero out of the childhood of history: cabin-boy, American general, conqueror of the French before Rome, deliverer of Sicily and Naples, and Dictator fired by his desire to deliver the ancient kingdom from the forces of the king whom the Republicans had snatched like a chestnut, badly scorched, from the fire. He had been a hermit on his island of Caprera, a poet with the heart of a child, a god among men, and the prey of a snobbish Englishwoman ! Unheard-of adventures and legends surround his name, and at the end we find him renouncing all his exploits to marry his housekeeper and settle down to obscure literary

work in Rome. If to any man in the modern world the antique title of Hero can be given, it is to Garibaldi, who nevertheless loved to figure in a theatrical and impossible costume—red shirt, white cloak and fantastic headgear. The singleness of his heart, barely touched by a naïve vanity, needed the outlet of this pose.

Cavour was the opposite pole of the same sphere: coldly intense, the most solid and thoughtful of all patriots, whom no demon could ride to destruction. Monarchist at heart (perhaps only because he hated the Utopian habits of thought and the high pale forehead of Mazzini), he nevertheless in sudden rage once boxed the ears of his king, Victor Emmanuel. He set down all heroics as windy insincerities, looked like a provincial professor, and lived as temperately as an Englishman.

Verdi had loved and prized Camillo, Count Cavour, as the saviour of Italy. And for this reason: that the tragic contradictions of the Italian revolt, the dissensions of Garibaldi and Cavour, were the contradictions of Verdi's own nature, which reflected in little the story of his time and nation.

Garibaldi stood for Verdi's lyrical side, for the whipped-up enthusiasm of his chorale and finale ensembles, the tears which he shed over deformed idiots, haughty gipsies, dark-skinned slaves and damsels of the Parisian demi-monde.

Cavour stood for his inexhaustible energy and productiveness, his hardness, his dissatisfaction with his work and his untiring self-mortification.

Garibaldi, who stood for beauty, the heroic—in a word, opera—was his essential self. Cavour was the rational urge that drove him on to pursue an ever-receding ideal. Moralist as he was, he could not be content with what he possessed in himself, but only in what he forced himself to acquire; his conscience could not approve the Garibaldi, but only the Cavour in him.

The sight of that wretched orchestra roused his wrath. The proverbial Italian poverty was only a myth; since Minghetti's administration the long-standing deficit of the budget had been turned into a substantial surplus. Was it necessary for a Government, that could find money enough for other schemes, to let the theatre starve ? The Maestro had often applied in vain to the Ministry for assistance in the financing of the Scala at least. There was the most pressing need for improvement both before and behind the scenes of the representative national theatre, the orchestra was placed much too high, the stage was absurdly impracticable, all the accessories were out of date, and the lighting apparatus completely worn out, but he could not obtain a hearing for his plea for help.

He thought angrily of the German opera houses that he had seen. The performance, to be sure, was tame and dull, but how orderly, serious and dignified ! The seating was well arranged, the orchestra spacious and sonorous, the stage was equipped with the latest mechanism from Paris. And there were a hundred other German towns with equally adequate theatres. The Maestro felt that this national indifference and careless incompetence was partly to blame for his own failure.

His eyes wandered dissatisfied to the stage, where a country tavern was crazily set up against a badly painted old wall. But his annoyance melted immediately, for the scene was full of life, and his judgment was always impartial. The gay crowd of soldiers, dancing girls, laughing students, market women, housewives and mulecarts brought to his mind the old author of the libretto, dead now for many years.

"They may sneer at your verses as they will, Francesco Piave," he said to himself, "you knew how to give us a picturesque and dramatic scene."

The number that was striking up now was one that always stood a little apart from all else in his mind because its many separate and independent parts harmonized in a very charming whole.

A party of pilgrims is passing the window of the tavern, contrasting with the profanity of the soldiers and dancers. *Aves* are being sung. The pilgrim choir sings a few stray dying phrases. Preziosilla, the fortune-telling dancing

girl of the soldiers' encampment, falls on her knee and sings, "Preghiamo," and out of this admonition develops the "Preghiera," the prayer solo or chorus which had been a standing feature in all Italian opera since the time of the Neapolitan school.

Disguised as a man, the unfortunate heroine of the opera comes on the scene of revelry. Leonora stands by the door a little apart, shuddering and fearful, hesitating whether to fly or remain. The voices of the devout choir before the window mingle with those of the worldly band. The men's voices rise in the invocation, "*Santo Spirito, Signor, pietà!*" and both choirs unite in the great chorus, "Holy Spirit, save us from the powers of evil." As the two choirs echo "powers of evil" the voice of Leonora soars above the harmony, "Save me, deliver me !"

She has only a short Melisma, descending from high B, to sing, but it is one that moves the listeners to tears. The other solo voices become more animated. Preziosilla is filled with sisterly sympathy and has a song that, for her, is unusually tender. Leonora utters her phrase from the first accompanying movement, "Save me, deliver me," again and again until it rises into a powerful strain surpassing all the other voices as if her heart was besieging heaven for help. The number was loudly applauded, and Verdi's practised theatre sense saw that the audience was already prejudiced in favour of the Dezorzi and her company. He himself was in some doubt. He had heard Margherita Dezorzi spoken of for some time as a rising star, and it pleased him that in this scene she had not taken the stage with the arrogance of the ordinary prima donna, but had stood back in the shadows singing and acting with restraint. Her voice, however, seemed to him colourless and unimpressive, hardly adequate to the typical task which in his opinion fell to the soprano, of throwing a flood of light upon the harmonic gloom of the other voices.

The old melodies came so fresh to him in these days, even taking him by surprise, that he had listened to the opera so far without any personal feeling, almost forgetting that it was not the work of someone unknown to him.

But with the next scene his indifference melted. A surprisingly good dawn was staged in which a little chapel of the Virgin showed on the left and a dark cloister wall on the right. The catastrophic motive was sounded by the orchestra no more than a hurried warning chord, piercingly repeated, like the heart-beats of one flying from pursuit.

The Dezorzi's entrance was inimitable. Hunted through the night she had taken refuge in a cave among the rocks from which she now rose suddenly into the clear morning light and stood with closed eyes, panting. She took a few steps forward as if with the last remnants of her strength, and leant fainting against the wall of the chapel, the hat and cloak slipping from her terrified figure. She wore the dark travelling costume of the eighteenth century nobility and high riding boots. Motionless in this position she began a short recitative:

"I am here. I thank thee, Oh God!
This is my last refuge—I am here!"

She had given such life to this short entrance scene, such an extraordinarily clear idea of the situation, that the Maestro was astounded. Even his best prima donna, Teresina Stolz, had not taken the stage like this, coming right up to the footlights and creating in a moment of silent, motionless acting, the atmosphere for her song.

The recitatives and Romanza that followed were given faultlessly and with the finest artistic feeling. Fired by the knowledge of Verdi's presence, which she had already divined, she succeeded that evening in accomplishing what no singer before or after her had done—in being realistic without sacrificing the unreality of opera, and in being operatic without weakening the realism.

Her "Now he leaves me, flies from me !" was yet another motionless wail of despair against fate, the final *morendo* in staccato notes a barely audible whisper

of revelation, its sweetness enhanced by a monotonous, insistent figure in the accompaniment. This figure consisted only of the octave F sharp, G, F sharp, the second note sharply accented. The tiny motive was repeated by the horns some twenty times, without losing itself either in the melody of the singer or the harmony of the orchestra.

The despairing Leonora looks round her, seeking for a ray of hope. The little window of the chapel gleams faintly. The ordinary prima donna would fall on her knees and implore the Virgin to help her, but Margherita Dezorzi felt that she must leave the frame of the drama here and rise into the bodiless, undisturbed world of song.

She took two steps, as one walking in sleep, and standing entranced without moving a muscle during the whole Romance, she sang with rapt eyes. And she sang now with all her powers. The coldness had vanished from her voice, but there was in it none of the ripe, sensual glow of the stage soprano; it soared up in flowerlike, childlike purity and spiritual beauty. Her voice swelling into the full melody of the prayer for mercy, she still stood deeply tranced in the realm of music, remote from the world. From behind the gates of the grey cloisters the distant male voices of the choir of monks are heard. As the prayer for help is repeated the third time and the murmur of the men's voices has drawn quite near, the voice of the fugitive sinks exhausted. Then, rising in a new ecstasy, she pours forth the final strains, awakens and re-enters the world of drama.

The Maestro had been drawn forward further and further in the box until he was at last, as the song ended, leaning far out over the front. His eyes were riveted on the fragile figure of the singer. He had forgotten the origin of the music, and heard himself speak there without conscious recognition, as if he had never written the notes.

A warm, charmed affection stole over him for the wonderful young interpreter of his music who stood down there. The spell of the woman singer had held him since his early youth. To his continent nature, never attracted by light adventure, the singers among whom he had been thrown had always appeared to him not as venal and fickle women of the stage, but as comrades in the service of music, sworn and honoured allies. As a boy he had gazed awestruck at the flaunting Divas of the footlights and loved them with a humble, reverent worship. As a man he had found in a true artist, a woman filled with music, the one being in the world in whose company he was not altogether lonely. Giuseppina Strepponi, the true helpmate of his life, and Teresina Stolz, the sympathetic friend of his riper years, had both met him with the rapture of song in their eyes and offered him a community of interest in music.

But how the genius of this young girl down there towered above all other singers, who had been only the powerful or sympathetic instruments of music.

The Dezorzi seemed a being altogether new and unknown to the stage, strangely distinguished, strangely gifted, endowed with an angelic clearness of perception. She lifted the old music into her own new world, and without altering a note seemed to retouch it with modern meaning. As the Maestro leant out over the box he forgot the danger of being recognized; he thought only of the gracious apparition before him, and it seemed to him that her eyes turned often to the place where he sat.

The duet with the guardian priest began. Once more with unerring certainty Margherita Dezorzi struck the balance between the dramatic and the musical, touching both scene and song with her peculiar charm.

The Maestro was a little anxious to hear how the *Più mosso* duet, which closes this scene, would go. But the Dezorzi, he found, had caught the not very manifest meaning of the stretto-like "*O gaudio insolito*," which was a song of thanksgiving for the shelter she had found. And now she filled the stage magnificently. The monks came out of their tower, each holding a candle against the setting sun. The young woman in man's attire knelt and the prior threw the monk's cowl over her. When she stood up her cheeks and eyes were hollow as those of an ascetic. The great choir now came forward for the mystic

investiture, and the *piano* four-part chorus, "*L'immonda cenere ne sperda il vento*" ("Vile ashes strewn unto the winds") made a hollow reverberation out of which there soared the heavenly melody of "*La Vergine degli Angeli,*" which concludes the scene and the act. With streaming tears, her voice almost fainting with ecstasy, the Dezorzi sang it to the end.

When the curtain had fallen and the storm of applause abated, the Maestro sank exhausted on the bench at the back of the box. Was that his music? The whole setting of the act had breathed only of Margherita. And she was so young, so unknown, to have evoked such deep feeling from a piece that he himself had believed to be already dead and forgotten.

Vague and distant the brilliant theatre lay before him. In the box opposite he recognized the Marchese Gritti. The lights were reflected on the centenarian's head as he sat motionless in his rigid dress clothes in the front of the box. The spell of the theatre, his fixed idea, fastened upon him from the moment that he took his place in the box, and the glittering house swam before him in a shower of many-coloured lights. The music never reached his ear with any great distinctness, but only as a confused noise of voices and music, or as the rumbling of many carriages in which sat people playing upon the bagpipes. Now and then the voice of a singer reached the old connoisseur's ear out of the monotonous blare of sound, but a singer of 1883 was very unlikely to please the critical taste of an *habitué* whose ideals of vocal art even Tamburini had not altogether satisfied. The piece itself Gritti was no longer able to follow. He did not grasp the meaning of any incident or any moment in the drama. The story of all the operas, most of which he had seen from five hundred to a thousand times, had vanished from his memory without leaving a trace behind, though he still retained a good memory for faces. He had never been particularly intelligent in grasping the meaning of dramatic work. But the Marchese's brain was nevertheless busy with an important problem. He could not be certain whether this performance was the twenty-nine thousand four hundred and thirty-seventh on his register, or the twenty-nine thousand four hundred and thirty-eighth. He had only to knock several times on the floor with his ivory-headed staff and François, who sat every evening on his chair outside the door of the box, would spring up and enter, bowing low, to settle the question. But the appearance of a servant in livery at the back of a box was not considered correct form until after the close of the piece, when opera glasses, bonbonnières and forgotten gloves had to be collected. And a breach of the laws of etiquette was unthinkable to the centenarian Andrea Geminiano, Marchese Gritti.

A group of critics stood by the door leading to the buffet. Their indifference seemed to indicate that they hardly knew what to talk about, for their opinion of the performance, being merely business, was, they seemed to consider, no fit subject for conversation. One of them, with full lips and heavy eyes, was gazing wearily after the pretty feet of a passing lady. Too bored at the moment to be moved even to libertinism, he turned again to the others, whose manner proclaimed to the world of laymen: "All this does not impress us. We know all the tricks, and have long ceased to be interested in them. We are only concerned with registering the impression made upon the public." A younger member of the group, who was actually somewhat excited, was trying to deceive his colleagues and conceal his interest by a display of acrid wit.

When the third act began the Maestro's brain was still benumbed by excitement as he sat forward again on his bench. The conductor was beating lifelessly. The Dezorzi did not appear in this act, and the magic had gone from the scene. The prelude by the tenor voices, which had a pretty enough air but was inclined to virtuosity, fell like a blow on Verdi, and all his worst misgivings began to re-assert themselves. He rose to leave the box.

The door opened, framing a slight figure, and Margherita Dezorzi stood before the Maestro. She wore a light, fur-trimmed evening cloak over her dark masculine costume. There was not a trace of paint on her face, even the eyes and lips were untouched by make-up. Her eyes burnt with unconcealed

eagerness and anxiety. She could not be sure how her daring would be received by the Maestro, who had the reputation of being unapproachable. She closed the door softly and bowed low in manly fashion.

"Maestro Giuseppe Verdi ! Pardon this liberty in one who admires and loves you ! When I recognized your well-known features I could hardly continue to sing, for I realized how great a moment this is for me."

The Maestro stood staring without a word. In the half darkness the Dezorzi's features were dim and ethereal. The fainting fugitive heroine of his opera stood before him. The singer felt the softening of his glance as he looked at her, and took courage. She seized his hand and pressed it with a quick motion against her breast. In sudden embarrassment he said, "Oh, Miss Dezorzi," and returned the pressure of her hand with his firm, capable fingers. The singer's instinct realized the strangeness and beauty of the situation, and the constant bias of her nature towards acting asserted itself, but the sincere veneration in which she held Verdi lent reality to her words.

"At last the dream that I have cherished from childhood—to look upon your loved and honoured face—has come true. For how much, Maestro Verdi, a poor singer has to thank you ! More than any other musician of the past or of the future ! This moment fulfils the desire of my life, and I can find no words to . . ."

Margherita blushed deeply. She drew closer the cloak, which had slipped off revealing her figure. Was it the name Margherita, or a real resemblance, or merely her youth that caused another long-forgotten face to rise suddenly between him and the dim, feminine features before him ? It was only a momentary flash of recollection, but it stirred and confused him. His voice was low and embarrassed, as it always became when he was strongly moved.

"I have far more cause to thank you, Miss Dezorzi, than you can have to be grateful to me. I could not have believed such a rendering as yours to be possible. You will make a great, a very great name for yourself."

Proudly and firmly Margherita looked in the Maestro's eyes.

"I know that Giuseppe Verdi utters no conventional compliments and that his appreciation is true praise."

The Dezorzi's beauty deepened under the increasing warmth of the dark, piercing look with which the Maestro's eyes rested upon her. She had found a noble mirror and she gazed in it with delight. Her heart beat fast as the musical voice again filled her eager ear.

"I know of no artist whom I could name beside you, after the act I have just seen. Your voice is not by nature one of great volume, but with what incredible power you make it answer every motion of your will ! There is not one of our operatic stars who possesses such a gift."

"Maestro, I have only one desire—that Verdi's work, which is not always presented in Verdi's sense, may be so sung by me as to show . . . But perhaps I am overbold."

The Maestro's delicacy prevented him from praising the singer further to her face. Margherita, who had a practical and ambitious aim in view, was disconcerted by his silence. She went on:

"It is said that a new work is about to appear. King Lear, or perhaps Père Goriol. What riches that will be for starving singers, such as we !"

The Maestro snapped the thread which the Dezorzi was winding.

"No, no ! I am old. I shall write nothing more. All these rumours are nonsense."

A light shone in the singer's face.

"Giuseppe Verdi is not old, he is immortal. I do not know what his years may be, but he stands before me in the prime of paternal manhood."

The phrase pleased her; she repeated:

"The prime of paternal manhood."

The music now heralded a battle with chorus and trombones. The Dezorzi's eyes shone brighter through the rising storm of sound that drowned all con-

versation. The Maestro could not control the effect of her words upon him. "But I am old, I am old"—the words droned through his head to the rhythm of the battle music. Margherita came closer to him:

"I did not come here out of vanity or ambition. I do not ask you, Maestro, to do anything for me. I do not want any letter, any recommendation. Forget me! I want something different."

The music became softer. Margherita Dezorzi bent her white brow towards the Maestro. Simply and with a note of timidity she whispered:

"Giuseppe Verdi, my father, kiss me."

The fragrance of her aura enfolded the Maestro. The kiss of recognition for which Margherita asked was not unusual in the theatrical world, but her gesture was neither theatrical nor perfunctory; it was inspired by real and fine feeling.

The Maestro pressed his lips lightly upon the girl's brow, but Margherita raised her face and brought her lips near to his. With sudden fervour he pressed the singer to him and received her wild kiss upon his mouth.

By the iron gate that gave admission to the stage, Italo stood pale with excitement and passion. For four days she had treated him with indifference, the Margherita of Carnival night no longer existed, and he was plunged into that fever of jealousy which he had so dreaded in Bianca.

"To-day, to-morrow, all time is one to me. Shadows have no memory."

Over and over again the singer's Delphic utterance repeated itself in his brain. Eurydice had been his, not Margherita.

She did not give a thought now to the young man. His function was fulfilled —she had spoken to Giuseppe Verdi.

Italo stood full in her path. She drew her cloak round her and said wearily:

"Let me pass! You see I am still in costume. I am tired. Let me pass."

He stood motionless on the spot after she had gone, while the music still rang loudly through the walls and doors.

His blood ran ice-cold, his brow was wet, every hair on his skin pricked him like a needle.

The game was lost. He had staked too much on this card. His brain was a blank, his betrayed senses whined and yearned in misery.

No hope, no oblivion, no spiritual ecstasy could blind him now to the truth. It fell on him there in the corridor bodily, like an actual weight that might break his back—his falsehood, his guilt, his infidelity to Bianca.

Dazed by this kiss of Margherita Dezorzi the Maestro stood in the box while his music swung onwards. His vigorous blood, awakened from long sleep would not be allayed. His longing for this wonderful girl was uncontrollable. Cursing himself for an old fool he repressed it sternly. Although his excited nerves demanded that he should wait for the last act, in which Leonora dies, he harshly denied himself and left the theatre during the third act.

On this evening, in his seventieth year, the Maestro experienced for the first time the keen, humiliating consciousness that life forces on more conceited, sense-enslaved natures at forty—the knowledge that love was no longer for him.

5

"I believe that our life is a meaningless and, what seems to me even worse, a fruitless story. What can come of it? What can we accomplish? If we face the problem squarely, there is but one answer—a saddening and humiliating answer: Nothing!"—*From a letter of Verdi to Clarina Massei.*

As the Maestro re-entered the hotel a heavy rainstorm began to beat upon the window. No sound in nature is so heart-breaking, so inhumanly mournful,

as the sound of rain. For the lonely it fills the cup of bitterness to the brim.

What had just happened to him, so he told himself, was merely a piece of passing fortune, a chance moment of happiness, to which no consequence attached. In all his members he still felt the yielding softness of the embrace, on his lips the kiss of the inspired girl. It was folly; such transport, such consuming desire, were not seemly in him.

The adventurous, glowing possibilities of future joy that may lie in the germ of a kiss, were no longer for him. His life had been the life of a navvy, a coal-heaver—an existence in which there was no time to live. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, asking for nothing but what was convenient and necessary for his work, he had never had leisure to taste the joy of living. He had never raised his eyes from the cave in which he toiled.

From the table, from merry companionship, from games, from reading, from discussion, he had constantly been called by the harsh, inexorable, insatiable voice of his own spirit, to work.

For fifty years, for seventeen thousand eight hundred days and nights, he had toiled, and only in the rarest of moments had there been any joy or satisfaction in it; struggle and effort had stretched every nerve to exhaustion.

What had this devil of misguided energy, this Satan, this Asmodeus of incessant motion wanted of him? Had he once in fifty years enjoyed peace even for an hour, or once gazed happily upon the blue of heaven? Even when music had been laid aside, had not this accursed spirit driven him on to fresh labours, to the improvement of roads and the development of agriculture, to farming and horse-breeding?—all of them things that he carried out admirably, but which brought him no reward except care and discouragement and ceaseless labour. And now the impetus was exhausted; he was only a worn-out machine.

The Maestro recalled a description he had read somewhere of stokers on a ship coming from the furnaces in the evening, their burning, exhausted bodies covered with grimy sweat, and falling as if dead in some corner of the deck. Were his last hours to be as void and joyless?

And what end had the labour of a lifetime served? Was art of any service to mankind? Unhesitatingly he found the answer: "Mankind to-day has not slightest use for any of the fine arts. The theatre is only the vapid toy of a secure and surfeited class cut off from all living reality. The art of music, like the others, has become a babbling repetition of formulas. Fischböck's music is the exception that dismally proves the rule."

The Maestro pushed the question a step further—"If my work had never existed, would it make the slightest difference to the world to-day?"

"No difference whatever."

The lifelong extension of all his powers to the utmost had been in vain.

He had, so ran his indictment, toiled only for reputation, had racked and strained his talent, had suffered and struggled, only out of a self-destroying ambition to be a popular idol. Yes, and in order to be an idol, the greatest of all idols, he had sacrificed for ever all human interests; he had forsworn the last remnants of duty and personal well-being in order to be honoured and worshipped as a god, above all other gods, to be immortal.

With grim satisfaction he began to strip bare the delusion of human immortality.

He himself had been born in the beginning of the century, his father towards the end and his grandfather about the middle of the preceding one—three generations in personal contact with each other. How much of the work that had been done since 1750 was standing now? A musician himself, he had known hardly any of the names in Gritti's mausoleum, beyond Pergolese and Piccini and Jomelli.

And what of the truly great?

Back to Shakespeare, half of whom, if one were to be absolutely honest, is already unintelligible or barely tolerable, runs the absurdly slender line for some eight generations. What of Homer, the mystic fountain-head of all poetry?

If he ever lived at all, ninety generations separate us from him—the space of time which the light of any star of the first magnitude takes to reach the earth. But it would not do to drag the stellar universe into the calculation.

The Maestro remembered that he had read some time before, in some review, of a geologist who held that the earth was entering upon a new glacial or diluvial epoch. At any minute the cosmic forces might bury all the accessories of our culture, its printing-presses, laboratories, machinery, electricity, orchestras, and choirs of nuns (what an advance !) under the hostile ice, and then an æon or so later there might rise out of the mass of our accumulated genius some adventurous speck of protoplasm which, after an eternity of effort, might culminate again in a tuft of couch-grass. Oh, true word of the ancient poet: "There is nothing certain except death." In all its vain ideas of greatness the ego must lay its account with destruction.

Unlike the northern philosophers, who move so nimbly in the free spaces that lie between idealism and pathology, the Maestro's mind did not run to speculation or dialectic, but demanded an answer to the problems of life.

His life seemed to him to have failed, to have been sacrificed to a senseless ambition to reach the summit of achievement and to suffer no other near him.

And even in this he had not succeeded. Derisively from every side came the cry: "You are only an eclectic, picking here and there among the old forms. Originality has been achieved by another, not by you."

Now that the last hope of his ambition had perished, his life must fall in ruins, exhausted, spent, burnt out, like the work that in an idle moment he had thrown upon the fire. How ironically had life bestowed on him its parting kiss ! Margherita Dezorzi ! It only remained now for death to deliver him.

With the malignant delight of a delinquent noting that he does not come alone into the place of judgment, a vision of many faces rose before the Maestro, faces that he knew and yet did not know. They seemed to be all young, with high, hydrocephalous foreheads rising over pale woebegone countenances. Were they the younger school who, united by a common mad ambition, and divided by hatred of each other, continued to trump by ever new refinements, and invent afresh their horrible combinations and modulations as if they must, at all costs, continually outdo themselves ?

Involuntarily. as by a reflex emotion, the mazes of the Lear music rose before him, and the peace of renunciation fell again on his consciousness, calming and restoring him.

All his life it had been his habit to bathe on the night before he took a journey, and he followed this custom now. His skin was burning, and in spite of the winter season he chose to use cold water.

Then, tingling and stimulated, he began his nightly pacing of the room with an ample dressing-gown round him. Suddenly the looking-glass, which he had hardly noticed before, attracted him. He stood before it marvelling that this greybeard should be the person who was known as Giuseppe Verdi.

It seemed to him that his image enclosed two personalities. In one he saw the child his mother had borne and loved. With the two-months-old Beppe in her arms she had taken refuge in the belfry of the Church at Roncole and saved him from the insane massacre of the children of Busseto by the Neapolitan soldiery in the year 1813.

He saw the unhappy boy, whose tears came so easily, who followed Bagasset and his fiddle, wondering why the other children shouted after him, "Bagasset, Bagasset !"

He saw the awkward lad, at once proud and timid, rough and tender-hearted, who, listening to the organ as he served the priest at mass, had dropped the holy vessels and been laid up for weeks by the blow on the head with which the exasperated celebrant rewarded him.

He saw the young organist, pupil of the honest Provesi, protégé of the catholic-minded provincial merchant and musical enthusiast, Barezzi. Yes, they had all loved him and he them. Barezzi, his opera master, Lavigna, who

had spent his evenings analysing Don Juan for him; Margherita, the mother of his little Icilio, all the thousand shadows of the past.

All these were he—the man who had come, he knew not how, to wear this wrinkled face.

Peppina loved him and he loved her, and his friends—the Massei, Arrivabene, Luccardi, the Senator, honest Muzio, who travelled and managed and battled for him. The nation loved him, as the newspapers witnessed, and he loved it.

But this successful man was not the Maestro altogether, any more than the other being he saw there was altogether he, the being who loved no one and whom no one loved—blunt, reserved and inscrutable, offering no vulnerable point to the world—the spirit of good or evil in him, whose distant gazing eye was turned elsewhere than on the world of men. The Maestro recognized this spirit in his image, the self which had always estranged him from the world.

The key stood in the lock of the cabinet in which the Tristan music lay. Verdi touched the red covers with fingers that thrilled nervously. There was nothing more to fear now, the strange spell which for long, so the world believed, had been cast over him no longer ensnared him. He had passed the goal. The danger of betraying himself was over, now that he had thrown away the pen. And yet he found it difficult, impossible almost, to open the book.

What fear did those pages inspire? What Herculean strength did they possess that even the last remnants of self-confidence that remained to him were shaken?

Until now all that Verdi knew of Wagner's work was the earlier operas, including Lohengrin, a few passages from the Walküre, and the extracts from Parsifal that Boito had played to him from memory. Conscious of his own freedon from the influence of Wagner, whom he was thought to imitate, he had avoided touching any arrangement of Wagner's music for the piano or even the orchestral scores. The obsession of the last great effort of his own life, as he realized now that its obscuring effect had been overcome, had inhibited him from allowing his attention to rest on the work or the ideas of the German composer.

At last, however, his hands were dallying with pages of the talismanic book at which for so long he had forbidden himself to look. Even in Italy and among the friends of whose opinions he thought highly, Tristan was, he knew, held to be such a work as had never been known or dreamt of before. Boito, he was well aware, avoided all mention of Tristan in his presence, out of respect and sympathy for him. Verdi almost believed that he should find this music written, not in the familiar notes and lines, but in some sacred hieroglyphic befitting a mystery hitherto unrevealed.

His first impression was one of disillusion. He turned over the pages of the duet in the second act and found that there was nothing in this music to dazzle him by its novelty. The forms were such as he himself, in the work that followed his Masked Ball, had employed as a matter of course.

The final harmonies, it is true, were never resolved. But that did not greatly surprise him, for he himself, patriotically anxious to uphold the honour of Italian music, had employed that modern convention in Aïda and had avoided the full close for the sake of dramatic effect. But even the rebel Wagner, it seemed, was in his secret heart under the spell of opera. For, if not in the vocal, then a hundred times in the orchestral parts he would slip into regular Aria, but immediately recognizing and blushing for his lapse—like a man who catches himself up as the tell-tale word is about to escape his lips—he would avoid the closing tonic in alarm and set off in a new direction.

The harmony, too, was based for the greater part on the diminished seventh which the Maestro had been using for years. He has mentioned it in a famous letter to Florino; "Not one of us can write a page that hasn't half a dozen of these diminished sevenths scattered over it," he wrote. "We all make a prop and a refuge of them."

The Maestro's keen eye saw, too, that Mathias Fischböck's outburst which

had recurred to him was not altogether unjustified. There was no true polyphony, but instead the lower tones were very freely used in figures which did not rise out of the themes proper, but occurred in passages of melody and isolated harmonies. There was, the Maestro recognized, something nervous and over-refined in this technique, but its rhythm was so confused and indefinite, so contrary to his own precision, that he could not understand how he had ever come to be charged with being indebted to Wagner in this matter.

For the rest, the old forms of accompaniment: arpeggio, harmonized recitative, staccato notes, appeared often though always modified in some way. Nor did the melodies present any feature with which the Maestro was not familiar. Even the two dancing triplets following a long note, a figure which had been in constant use since Bellini, was not lacking. The periods were very freely handled, but the development of the motive, on the other hand, usually followed an orderly sequence such as Verdi himself used whenever that course commended itself to him.

He could see no reason why, as a musician, he should blush before Wagner. Independently of the German he had found for himself a musical speech which had been equally true to the spirit of his time. But how beautiful, how charged with music Bülow's arrangement for the piano seemed to be ! The Maestro had had to content himself with the efforts of his faithful Muzio, who had arranged his scores for the stiff fingers of the piano-thumping plebs, but Muzio's chief anxiety had been not to encumber the voice part with too many notes. They were mere skeletons of his opera, these piano selections, while Tristan, in Bülow's adaptation, was a powerful piece of music.

The Maestro had expected to read his doom in this red volume. So far as his eyes could present the sound (he was a poor reader) this music was beautiful, narcotic, yearning and imaginative, but it was merely the outcome of its own day, it was the work of a man, and could not undo his own.

Wagner had scorned Aïda.

(Could he be certain that the movement of the German's hand on the Piazza had been one of scorn ?)

No matter ! He himself had judged those pages with clear, impartial eyes. He knew that an imperfect reading could not give him a full knowledge of the work, but he had gathered enough to be sure that it was not Wagner's music that had brought about Verdi's downfall.

The Maestro laid the book aside. There was no trace of rancour against Richard Wagner in his heart. The music had confirmed in him that consciousness which he had long felt, that in spite of all contradictions, if he had a brother among his fellow artists it was this man. The German might, indeed, sit there in his palazzo at his great dining table, surrounded by friends, or go, reverently greeted, from them to rest. No hero was so adored by his followers as he, while the Maestro of the Risorgimento, for the moment anonymous in this Italian town, had after many lonely bitter evening hours made a deliberate end of all his work. And yet, at that moment Giuseppe Verdi felt an irresistible, unreasonable but unconquerable sympathy and even pity, as warm as it was unwarranted, for Richard Wagner.

6

"On the way an indescribable uneasiness seized me, a deep unreasonable depression ; the very agony of death seemed to press upon my heart."—*From an autobiographic sketch by Verdi of the early history of Nabucco. Quoted by Arthur Pougin.*

Towards morning the Maestro woke, but was unable to collect his senses altogether. A heavy oppression lay upon him, and a feeling—he did not know whether of dream or reality—that Margherita Dezorzi had appeared to him and inflicted some injury upon him. To his half-awakened senses his body seemed

strangely weighted, and he gradually became aware that his legs were cold and powerless; cramp seized him, all his limbs seemed to be bound in an iron grip. His pulse was weak and irregular, and his heart beat slowly with long, suffocating pauses. His head, heavily sunk in the pillow, seemed to grow enormous, his brain made helpless efforts to master the weakness, but he could not find strength to reach any consciousness except the conviction:

"This is the moment of death."

Half-formed thoughts appeared and disappeared in the light of this idea.

"It is hard to die here in a hotel bed! There will be a scandal! They will find me! The funeral! Silly fuss!"

Then:

"Peppina! She will come here! Yes, it is certainly death! Another heart-beat! I would not have thought that it would come so soon! I was all right! But what am I doing here?"

The iron hand crept closer and closer on his heart. The labouring blood spurted feebly through his brain.

"Well! I have nothing against it! It's painful, but it will be only a moment! My heart has stopped beating now. Help me, O God!—It is the best way, I have nothing to lose now!—Perhaps some one could help me! Carvagno! No!—The centenarian will outlive me! Sitting upright there in the theatre! Wagner will outlive me! That is Death that I hear rushing!"

He was no longer conscious of his body. His heart cramped itself together like a fist, weakly clenched, at long intervals. All his organs were in the grip of death. "It is not so terrible after all! Why do men fear it?—Ah, now it is coming! Eternal God! It is terrible, terrible! I have no will left! If I could will something, it would not be so terrible! Dishonoured years! Why not will? But what? I have neglected it. The visit!"

As if blown on a wind the thoughts fluttered through his consciousness.

"I am dying! I have not visited him! Venice in vain—too late!"

The cramp seized his heart. His last conscious thought was that he had not called upon Wagner.

The unconsciousness that overcame him on this February night was the first intimation of the approach of death which his iron frame had suffered since the nervous attack on the way from Merelli's that he called "the Moment." This time it was a physical heart seizure which rendered him unconscious for some time. But it was not the prelude to any serious illness, and he had no other attack for the next twelve years.

Never having been seriously ill in his life, he could only believe that this seizure was death itself as the rushing sound in his ears increased and overpowered his senses. His threatened life, defending itself furiously, whipped him on through the dim borderland of dream and unconsciousness. His mind grasped nothing. The rushing in his ears did not cease, but it was changed; gradually it transformed itself into a *Te Deum laudamus* sung by a great choir. Over the shoulder of this Te Deum—for the music was visible, it looked like a cloud—rose a monstrous red polar sun, warming his frozen limbs. The Maestro returned to life. Within three minutes his strong constitution had conquered the seizure. He recognized Beppo, who was standing by his bed with a candle. As time passed his heart began to beat quietly and regularly again. Only his fingers now remained cold and his limbs were still weak and powerless. In a low voice he asked:

"What is it, Beppo?"

"O Signor Maestro! Forgive me! I have been so anxious! And it seemed to me that you called out!"

The light dissipated the last traces of the trance of death. Verdi took the glass of brandy from Beppo's hand, and a glow of returning strength ran through his veins. He could even smile.

"Take a glass yourself, Beppo, it will warm you. You are shivering! And if ever you hear me in such a state again, come and look after me!"

As he was going the Maestro added:

"We shall leave to-morrow evening. Pack the trunks and see that they are at the station in time. Now go back to bed !"

Beppo went off happily with his glass, leaving two gaslights burning.

The Maestro sat up. With his renewed strength a strange feeling of inspiration glowed through him, and he breathed deeply, restored to life.

In his sudden thankfulness that he was still alive he could not restrain his tears. How much he had had to struggle against in this strange, dark, water-lapped city—his art, his ambition, his age, the last appeal of woman, and now even death itself.

But he had conquered death, and with it Wagner also. He could think now without distress of the German lying asleep somewhere near. A glow of friendliness mingled with the warmth of the returning life that surged, quickened and youthful again, through his veins. The world might class him far below the German, but he had gained a higher knowledge and perception than all the critics put together, and their verdict could not deceive him.

Richard Wagner and he, out of all mankind, were peers and comrades.

His resolution stood firm—"To-morrow I will go to him."

The feeling of light and comfort remained with him. He lay in bed through the morning until the recollection of Fischböck came to him. He must go at once and speak to him plainly, give the money to him or to his wife—and then away !

In a pleasant languor, such as follows a seizure of this sort, the Maestro slept again.

He slept till after midday, a thing almost unknown in him. He was awakened by the Senator, who seemed to be wholly possessed by some mysterious excitement. He dashed into the room with exaggerated cheerfulness, moving restlessly and nervously about. He was obviously repressing some secret with great difficulty, and asked the Maestro again and again how he meant to spend the evening.

Verdi had determined not to mention his departure, so as to avoid the embarrassment of leave-taking, and he answered carelessly that he should stay indoors.

"That's right," cried the Senator over and over again. "Splendid ! Bravo ! Just the thing."

But in spite of these expressions of satisfaction the apostle of freedom continued to ruffle his white mane with a perplexed hand.

The Maestro looked at him questioningly, but the mystery remained unsolved, for he suddenly took a hurried leave, and, in the excess of his cunning, cut himself off finally from the idol of his life.

CHAPTER X

THE RETURN OF MELODY

1

After the night of rain, the sun, conquering the sea haze and the morning clouds, shone brilliantly upon the clean-washed paleness of the town. It burst suddenly over the street, the squares and the canals, and rebounded from the windows upon the opposite banks. The eye could not rest for a moment on the lagoon where the light danced and glittered upon the waves.

In the morning Renzo, the Senator's younger son, the unconscious scapegoat of Italo's lie to Bianca, returned to Venice. He had been accompanied as far as Padua by his master Labriola, who had come there to complete certain researches

in the University Library which would occupy him for several days. Renzo utilized the first of these to visit his father and his brother.

He did not find his father at home. He had been out, so the servant said, since eight o'clock that morning, and Italo, who had only come home at nine in the morning, was asleep. There was nothing for the student to do but to stroll through the streets and enjoy the beauty of the sun-enchanted city.

He went to the Piazza, and the idea of climbing the Campanile, which he had not done since his tenth year, pleased his fancy.

When he finally stood, quite alone, in the gallery of the bell tower he was enraptured by the indescribable beauty of the scene that lay before him, a city spirited out of the world of reality as if the veil of a *Fata Morgana* had been cast over it. It lay in a clear distinct body, like a strangely fashioned animal covered with dense reddish scales through which metallic warts and spines glimmered here and there. This prehistoric monster was sunning itself upon a shining mirror-like surface and passively submitting itself, with a million glancing reflections of satisfaction, to the god-like fury of the sun. It was all feminine, this far-spreading creature, and grew ever tenderer and more maidenly as it receded to the horizon. The mist lay on the sea like a faint cloud, a disappearing breath upon the mirror. The chain of islands shimmered and swam like children at play: Lido, Malamocco, Pellestrina, while nearer at hand the lesser ones slept by their mother, Murano, Burano, Mazzorbo, Torcello. The swamp-beset mainland steamed and, across the plain, the fields seemed to ferment, as the sod, from which the snow was melting so rapidly, thawed in sun. From the maternal body of the land there rose a soft exhalation—wheat, maize, wine and household smoke. Up there he was too high for the pungent odour made up of oil, excrement, wet linen, ammonia, and rotting fish, to reach him. A thousand splinters of light glittered over the plain, and on the verge of the invisible distance, clear and transparent through the floating clouds, the crystalline peaks of the Alps barred the way of the approaching spring.

Renzo leant far out over the balustrade. The distorted angle of the Piazza, the clustered domes of the parti-coloured Basilica, the thronging houses, the islands, the lagoon, the sea were all so small, so near. It seemed as if a man might step clear over to the horizon.

Seized by the vertigo that great height induces, the young man leant dizzily with closed eyes against the slender grill of the gallery. He felt a little seasick, and, at the same time, impatient that a brain trained in the mazes of economics should be overcome by such weakness. But the elements show small respect for the reasoning faculties.

With a rattle of ropes and groaning of gear an intolerable brazen clang burst overhead. The bells broke loose, crashing madly through the shivering air that seemed to howl like a wounded beast. The maelstrom of sound whirled and eddied like a hurricane through the affrighted air, and Renzo, clutching his hat, fled down through the doorway of the tower to escape its fury.

No trace of his overnight attack lingered with the Maestro next day. A pleasant sense of freedom pervaded his being, recalling the holiday feelings with which in childhood he had stood before his window and looked out upon the morning sunshine in the deep, quiet blue of a summer Sunday. He exchanged his everyday, somewhat countrified suit for a well-cut black coat that gave a distinguished air to his lean but broad and firmly knit figure. He sent for a barber and had his beard and his hair, which he wore long upon his neck, trimmed a little.

The feeling of comfort and well-being that followed was not entirely the result of these attentions. The constraint of the past weeks, the doubt of the future which had oppressed him, his uncertainties and anxieties, the sense of his own inadequacy—all his discouragement, were dwarfed and set behind him by the death struggle through which he had come. Here in Venice he had finally settled his account with himself in an unsparing self-examination.

The sense of holiday freedom which he enjoyed awoke again the strength and

self-confidence of his best days. He looked upon himself with a new objectivity and no longer measured himself by any other man, for only in a disordered nature do envy and ambition rear their heads. To a man in touch with reality there is no invidious classification in life. It may be that higher and more successful beings than himself exist, but these also are part of that reality in which, as in a democracy, he plays his own part and has no cause to envy that of any other. It is only those who are not at home in life who seek to destroy the hierarchy of existence. But to reach this state of poise is itself a high and heavy task.

When on Christmas Eve his gondola had glided past that of Wagner on the canal the Maestro had calmed himself with the words—"I am Verdi, you are Wagner." But not till now had the words been truly realized. Not till now had he learnt to accept himself for what he was, without rivalry, invulnerable to all criticism, all comparison.

Sympathetically, warmly, he recalled those strangely impressive features taxed beyond their powers to express the ceaseless flow of life that pulsed within, and bearing witness in their strained and suffering look, to the insufficiency of the human machine for its task. Like the keel of a ship, which is the symbol of the will in man to subdue the sea, that powerful chin jutted forward into the subjected world. In spite of the wave of the hand which the Maestro had misinterpreted on the Piazza, the recollection of Wagner's figure and features moved him only to respect. As that debonair face rose before his mind he saw in it none of the lurking arrogance of the fanatic. The voice was sweet, even childlike in its candour, free from all reserve or pretence.

Sympathy grew to friendliness, to a peculiar tenderness even, mixed with fatherly solicitude and a desire to protect this wildly prodigal being. There were no warring voices in him now, but only pleasure at the thought of standing in this man's presence within the hour. He did not dream about the meeting, he *knew*, definitely and certainly, what would happen.

Wagner would hurry to meet him on the steps of the palace and, happy to be so honoured, draw him into the room. In French mingled with Italian he would greet him, his delight at welcoming the idol of the Italian race lending him words. The wonderful and momentous speech that would pass between them formed itself in his mind. He heard himself, Verdi, say:

"I do not underestimate my own work, but I know that with my 'Aïda,' of which you, Richard Wagner, have never heard, Italian opera has come to an end. The youth of Italy has forsaken the national tradition and gone over to you and your music-drama. To-day lyric melodrama is despised and derided. There was a time, as you can well imagine, when this derision was not indifferent to me, for it fell most heavily upon myself, the heir of Italian music. But now I am old enough, as you, Maestro Richard Wagner, doubtless also are old enough, to think calmly upon questions of Art and fame, and the opinion of the future which men call immortality. Man is slow to understand either his body or his mind. But at last we come to know what food is unsuitable for us, and what illusions will not stand the light. I, for example, have only after many bitter experiments, lost the illusion that I could begin once more at the beginning and turn my work into a new channel, independent of my past. Only the last droppings of life are left to me now. I am not, I confess, well acquainted with your work. But the voice of the world, the opinion of my best friends, assures me that it has no rival in the history of our Art. You sit before me with colour in your cheeks and youth in your eyes, there are many victories still before you. Believe me, in all sincerity, there is no man who wishes you well more heartily than I. And I am glad now, grateful as any younger man, to come here to you . . . at this moment . . ."

While this speech rehearsed itself in his mind the Maestro had been sitting, leaning back in an arm-chair. The foretaste of the visit was very sweet, his eyes were closed in abstracted concentration. All at once there rose before him a great room with many high pointed windows. It was not the Vendramin,

but Wagner stood in one of those tall windows gazing out at the sky or across the sea. The Maestro knew that he himself had just finished speaking. Wagner turned slowly towards him. Would he speak now? But he only moved his hand and his lips silently and earnestly. Then he came with his poised characteristic movement towards the Maestro; two friendly blue flames approached and drew Verdi's eyes deep into their fire. Again their eyes met, but in the mingling there was an unbearable glory, a fire that burnt his starting pupils.

Dazed the Maestro rose from his chair. Sunshine, blazing sunshine filled the room, which shivered under the storm of light. The inexorable sunlight poured in through the wide window, while outside the boats blazed and the lagoon was consumed in its flame.

As Verdi stepped into the gondola to go to the Palazzo Vendramin the bells broke loose. The mid-day sun had spread a strange sense of enlargement over all the town. The streets were full and everywhere snatches of song and music were heard. The Maestro noticed that many of them were snatches from The Power of Destiny. The gondola turned into the Canale del Palazzo, glided under the Bridge of Sighs, passed the blind palaces with their dim half-closed eyes, and gardens whose bareness was only relieved by a few bay trees and dark pines, and entered the Canale Fava where the buildings were shrill with chattering voices. Behind the Rialto they passed into the Canale Grande on which, crowded to-day with water traffic and steamboats, danced tiny foam-tipped waves. The Maestro was surprised to see flags flying everywhere in the blazing light. Could there be a feast this very unusual day—the Tuesday after the Carnival?

The sense of the importance of the day increased. It was thus that he had felt in the greatest hours of his life, the first concert of the Philharmonic Society of Busseto, the première of his first opera *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio*, his début in the opera "Jerusalem." But his emotion now was calmer, less anxious and happier than then. He was going to meet the adversary with whose name for twenty years the world had threatened him, and he went with friendship in his heart.

Vendramin appeared, the five double windows of every story golden with noon. Its smoke rose like little towers in the vibrating air. Hanging with algæ and seaweed, rotting and worn with time, the great cross-driven piles kept guard before this ancient house of kings. As the Maestro paid the gondolier and stepped out, on one of the steps lapped by the water he clearly saw the tiny crabs trying to reach the ledge and falling back again and again. The gates stood wide open. In the wide hall there was nobody visible, nor in the court-yard. The Maestro looked round, and went up to a glass door where he rang the bell. No one seemed to hear. He stretched out his hand again to the bell and let it fall.

A man came running heavily down the stairs, swung the glass door open and was about to pass the Maestro without a look or a word. Verdi stopped the man, whose mouth opened in a cry. He recognized him as the porter whom he had seen some days before at the door on the Calle larga Vendramin as a gentleman was leaving the house bowing deeply, and recalled how the man had summed him up then with a glance.

The Maestro held his card in his hand.

"Is Herr Wagner at home? Will you be so good as to take this card to him?"

The porter stared without comprehension in the visitor's face, then the horror of which he was the image overcame him again. His voice rose in the shriek which he had suppressed.

"Herr Wagner! Oh! Oh! The Master is dead! A quarter of an hour ago he died! Oh, the dear, good Master! What a terrible blow!"

The man's face quivered and he began to weep. With the tears his horror relaxed and the self-importance of the domestic asserted itself.

"He is dead, the good master ! And only two hours ago he called me, joking and laughing, the kind master ! And a few days ago when the Carnival was over he came back to the house with the other gentlemen. I opened the door and made my bow, but the dear master looked at me, he looked at me with such sad eyes, the poor blessed angel, and laid his hand on my shoulder, just here,—Oh ! Oh !—and he said, '*Caro mio amico, il carnevale è andato!*' Yes, that was what he said to me, the poor Master ! It was to me, only to me, that he said it. Oh !"

With despairing gestures the man ran into the yard, and through the double gates into the street to spread his sad news and his self-importance.

The house door stood open. The Maestro turned quietly away without looking back, and as he passed out he saw a church standing before him.

2

The cool dark spaces of the church opened before him. The Maestro hated the clergy. Vengeance on Rome was in his blood, for he believed the church to have been the curse of Italy. When Peppina and the servants went to Mass on Sundays he remained at home alone, working gloomily in the empty house.

But now in his stupefaction, following an involuntary impulse of flight, he entered the church. He had once been an altar-boy and later church organist. That also was in his blood. There were only a few candles burning on the altar round which the shadowy forms of some young priests moved and knelt. It was the season when long prayers and litanies filled the hours of every day until Passion Week, and ten thousand sacred names were individually and collectively invoked. The liturgy, "*Ora pro nobis, orate pro nobis,*" rose from the choir as the young clerics bleated on in the monotonous, habituated tones that have characterized the priestly voice since time began. The Maestro saw no worshippers but only the passing and repassing of the priests. Every step resounded with unnatural loudness and woke a chain of echoes; when anyone coughed the walls thundered back.

Verdi sat down on a bench. His mind was still blank. The chant seemed to ring louder every minute.

Slowly the consciousness spread round him,

"Wagner is dead !"

At first it seemed to be an embarrassment, like the inopportune mention of something dreadful and sacred and intimate. Then he remembered coming there in the gondola, his happy anticipation of the meeting, the sense of holiday that he had had all the morning. Now, that long desired meeting would never take place. Wagner was dead, had died even while he was on the way to visit him. Why should it be ? There seemed to be something fatal in it. Twice he had met him. The third time he might not. Why ? Last night he himself had been within a hairsbreadth of death. And to-day Wagner had died. Had death hesitated between them, uncertain which to choose, then spared him and decided for the other ? Wagner was dead. Honoured and beloved as he was, he was dead. And the world outside, the priests up there, seemed to take no notice. It was nothing to them.

But something very terrible had happened—happened to himself ! The Maestro waited for the grief that must surely fall upon him. For twenty years Richard Wagner had lived constantly in his thoughts, and therefore he had lost one who was very near to him. He had never hated him. And since they had met in La Fenice this desire to speak with him had become almost a passion. Now Wagner was dead.

Grief must come now.

But no grief came. Drearily, wearily the chain of sacred names creaked on and the choir joined in the monotonous dance rhythm:

"*Ora pro nobis, orate pro nobis!*"

The Maestro tried to suppress something that was rising in him, dark, strong and perceptible. He was ashamed, he was astonished at the cold, uncontrollable sensation. No grief, as he had expected, as he had hoped, was rising within him, no tears. No, it was a misbegotten prickling joy that stirred in him like a multitude of little insects infesting and overrunning every muscle of his face. He was horrified at the sensation; it was something loathsome and corrupt, this joy, but it was stronger than any other sensation.

"Wagner is dead. I am alive. I have survived the battle. But he is fallen. He has come off loser, for he is dead and I am alive."

It seemed to him as though for the last twenty years he had been fighting a daily and nightly duel and that now, after giving himself up for lost, he had won. His lungs expanded with the dark joy of victory. The simile of the spring occurred to him again. "If one stream dries up, another must swell."

"Wagner is dead. He can produce no more. His work lies completed before the world, he can add nothing to it now."

But the Maestro lived still. Who knows? He was alive, and everything is possible. He felt the wild light spring into his eyes, of this joy that was pumped from the depths of his loins by his heart.

The incantations of the wizards by the altar droned on, nasal and automatic.

Whither had now vanished the sympathy he had felt, the victory he had gained? Was his self-renunciation also a lie? In the tortuous mazes of a man's mind all his impulses live together. No evil emotion is ever destroyed. The serpent's head rises again from the ground when its hour strikes. The first emotion with which the Maestro had greeted the delivered soul of Wagner had been a bestial, evil joy in the death of another.

But already disgust had followed. His fist began to beat the desk in self-loathing—an opposing tattoo of which the litanies took no heed.

The Maestro now recognized this moment of evil joy as the vilest moment of his life. Better be dead himself than entertain such thoughts. Is this humanity? First hastening to his brother with open arms and then rejoicing in his downfall! His knuckles beat harder upon the desk.

In the depths of the human soul lies a bottom of pestilential mud, despair and anger, upon which we build a gaily painted house of cards, and label it virtue, good works, learning, self-conquest. Is only the bottom real? Is the superstructure a sham that it collapses so easily?

Wagner was dead.

On a distant altar they began to celebrate mass and new voices joined in. The Maestro was recalled to his surroundings. His brain tried to jerk itself free from the inroad of external things, which called for response. At that moment nothing existed for him but the thoughts that filled his mind, all else was dead and unreal to him. And through these thoughts there echoed a bitter laughter:

"Such is man!

"There is no reality in his emotions or his thoughts. Our emotion is not our own. Our acts are not our own. Last night I was all but dead. Half an hour ago Wagner died. He or I. Why do we take ourselves so seriously?"

The fugue of bitter laughter raced meaninglessly through his brain.

"There is no reality. There can be none. All that is upon the earth is a grim, a ghastly jest."

The litany, which for a time had been drowned by the other proceedings in the dim church, now re-asserted itself.

"*Ora pro nobis, orate pro nobis.*"

And the sorrow that he had waited for in vain fell upon the scoffer's laughter.

Wagner was dead. The meeting was dead.

The people thronged into the rows of benches. The noise in the church grew too loud to be longer ignored.

Suddenly the Maestro came to himself. He had heard the name Fischböck spoken distinctly behind him. He turned and saw two country women whisper-

ing together, and every whispered word seemed to sound like Fischböck. Verdi rose quickly and left the church. If he had failed towards Wagner he would make it up to his young fellow-countryman.

3

That night Italo again attempted to intercept Margherita Dezorzi. He waited for her before the door of her house at the hour when she must return from the opera—The Power of Destiny. That she would not come alone he felt certain. How could it possibly be so? Only a few days before she had given him her love, so sweetly, so unexpectedly, that he had been rapt out of his senses. Only one night! Could a woman be so cold? On Bianca the least intimacy had left its mark for days. Again and again he recalled the Delphic phrases of Eurydice as she bade him return to Bianca Carvagno.

"Be a man, dare all, and go to her."

Ah, that was a subtle trick which only bound him to her closer, and then,

"I am Eurydice, and live with death. Nothing is real to me!"

It was true; she had warned him. Now she had cast him aside. Why? Why? Italo could not find an answer.

In a few minutes now they must come, she and the man. A clear, unhesitating picture of her knight stood before his eyes—he was a tall, broad-shouldered man with straight dark hair and a short curling beard, a bold, statuesque beard. Italo hated this phantom in his heart. He touched a spiked ring upon his finger. He would throw himself between them, seize the man, strike him, kill him and die himself, making an end of it all. He longed for this scandalous affray as if it were the solution of all his perplexities.

But Margherita appeared alone, followed by her mother. The singer strode forward, like a man, with long steps. Her eyes were fixed on the ground as if in depression, and her face was very serious. She looked almost plain, and the trace of vulgarity in her features was intensified in the gaslight. There was nothing of Eurydice visible in that tall, energetic figure with its flowing cloak. This Margherita did not live with death. The mother could not keep step with her. She was carrying the costume and theatre accessories in a hand-bag. The daughter threw a word behind her several times, sharply and clearly. There was a finality in her tone as if the ten commandments were being laid down anew.

But where was the man?

Italo stood in the shadow, his plans thrown into confusion by the absence of this cavalier. He did not attempt to approach the two women.

Later he went up to the door and rang. The mother was polite but smiled nervously. The sight of her flabby, matronly face, that never seemed to draw any conclusions from all the experiences it passed through, somehow broke down all his regard for convention.

"Then I can't speak to Margherita?"

"The poor child is not well. We must take care of her. It is such a strain on her every evening! The doctor says she must see nobody during the day, nobody at all."

"Do you mean that I am never to see her again?"

"Oh, no, why shouldn't you? The season only lasts a fortnight longer. We were very glad, both of us, to see the gentleman in the theatre. Margherita was very anxious that he should come. We are very grateful to you."

Italo went away. As he passed through the sleeping town huddling itself together for the night, the thought of suicide came to him more than once. It was not despair that prompted these thoughts, but a certain absurd regard for propriety. It had failed, this body of his, at every test, been worsted in every conflict, it could do nothing except cause him suffering.

A last hope: to go to Bianca, and confess his falsehood. But did she not

know it already? And after that? Even if her love were great enough to overlook all it was too late, too much had happened. He had not the courage to look her in the face.

Italo ran; he stood still; he tore off his coat; meaningless words spurted from his lips. A ghastly loathing of himself rode upon his neck like a nightmare. The only emotion that rose above the emptiness and paralysis of his mind was a whimpering home-sickness for Bianca. He would go to her house and spend the night under her window. But shame held him like an exorcism from approaching the part of the town where she lived. After many perambulations he found himself in the Calle largo Vendramin. He leant against the courtyard walls of Richard Wagner's house and waited for the late winter dawn.

Finally, about half-past eight he went home; there was nothing else to do. He did not meet his father, and his brother Renzo did not arrive at the house till an hour later. Italo slept for several hours. At mid-day he was awakened by a letter. He felt so tired and powerless that he held the envelope for a while in his hand with a vague smile, unable to rouse himself.

Suddenly his senses cleared. All his life he never forgot the moment, stinging to the quick of his soul, when he read the signature of that letter—Carvagno.

The message was only two words:

"Come here."

Under the name was the address of the hospital to which the doctor called him.

4

Bianca's fate was fulfilling itself.

For two days after the scene on the landing stage she kept silence, on the third she told her husband all. The confession was made with perfect calmness, as if she had no forgiveness to ask, but only a statement to make concerning an event in her life for which no one could be held answerable.

Since the day when she had fainted and remained unconscious so long, the change that had been appearing in her for some weeks became complete.

Her face now showed no trace of her former excitement or moodiness. All the despair and bitterness and mad longing of the wild vengeful Roman lover had disappeared. Was it the tenacity with which she clung to some support that left no strength for any other feeling?

Mythical legend tells how the Mother of the Gods throws her mantle over the woman who is drawing near to the agony of childbirth. Like a golden cloud this mantle seemed to cover Bianca; she did not appear to suffer, nor once to think of her suffering. Her mind was nothing but a dark, submissive expectancy; she was as unapproachable and impassive as an idol.

Since he had realized her unfaithfulness, the husband felt that he had not the least authority or claim over her, completely altered as she was. The knowledge not only took away all his rights, but added to his remorse.

He, himself, had been the cause of it all; he had lived only for himself, for his own ambition; he had bound this noble creature to himself, and then abandoned her, utterly, to that nonentity Italo.

The only regret that troubled the woman's mind now was that she had brought misery upon a vain, handsome boy. Carvagno lived through some of the hardest days of his life. As he had thrown himself doggedly into the fight for the life of his patients, so he now struggled with the paralysing barrier that separated him from Bianca.

He knew that his presence distressed her, and he remained in another room, or even outside the house, so as to be near her without giving her pain. He fought against all unavailing thoughts, and often choked down a wild sob, in the fury of his longing, his love, his desire to be at one with her again.

He recalled now the conversation with Giuseppe Verdi, as they had walked together. How simply and finely the Maestro had spoken of women and of the awful miracle of motherhood for which he honoured and pitied them.

Pity for woman !

Yes, but this woman, who had betrayed him, who was bearing the child of her unfaithfulness, had risen so far beyond and above him that he could not feel pity, but only a reverent dread of her.

He was passing through the most profound moment of mortal experience, one to which very few men ever attain. For the most part they are content to pass dark and troubled lives, filled with their own masculine interests, ambitions and perversities, by the side of a woman, helping to shut out the abyss over which human life is hung by making a puppet and a plaything of her. And women take their gifts, reflecting the masculine grimace, because life can be a little lightened so.

But Carvagno saw in Bianca now, with a terrible helplessness, the reality, the isolation of womanhood. He could not understand her mystery, vex his brain as he might, for he had no sense by which it might be perceived. Woman was an alien creature to him. Looking back he saw that even his mother had never been really near to him, that in truth he had known nothing of her except that, out of her sacred fastness, she had succoured him.

Now he listened, unseen, to the steps and breathing of Bianca on the other side of the door. In such moments his dread of the unknown gave way, and his longing grew intolerable to be again as they had been in the first enrapturement. Without knowing or desiring it, she had inflamed his love anew, for the sense of impediment is always the enkindling spark, and for eternities, between the moments of love, woman remains unknown.

Carvagno, the untidy, untiring physician, who had been so entirely absorbed in his work, forgot everything in the frenzy of his new love and his remorse. Not for a moment did it occur to him to excuse or blame himself for his neglect of his duty or his interests. All external things were unreal and immaterial in the world where he moved now. One thought only exercised his mind—to find the way back to Bianca, to begin a new and wiser life with her, to retrieve the stupid errors of his past. He wrote to two University towns for, unquestionably, the new life could not be begun in Venice.

Bitterly as he suffered, he knew that the immediate necessity was to endure, to wait, until this bitter obscure experience should pass. For the first time in his life he put his profession completely aside.

On the night of the twelfth of February the catastrophe happened which rendered an immediate operation for Bianca's delivery necessary. As morning broke Carvagno brought his wife to the hospital in the little emergency boat. The doctor, whom his colleagues had always credited with the imperturbability of a field-marshal, was in a pitiable state. Sleepless, unshaven, tear-stained, shivering with cold, he was aged by twenty years. He prayed incessantly to the saints of his childhood, and fell weeping on the neck of the chief surgeon who undertook the operation. He begged him to save the patient, to save him, for he refused to outlive his wife by an hour. They all marvelled to see their stark Head so unmanned; few of them had even known that he had a wife.

In the course of the morning Carvagno regained his composure after this breakdown. The gynæcologists of the day were strongly prejudiced against the use of chloroform in the preliminary stages of induced labour, and Bianca was condemned to intolerable torture. The child was in the seventh month, and lying very unfavourably. The loss of blood was severe and everything indicated that hope was reduced almost to vanishing point.

The doctors marvelled in astonishment at the fortitude of the sufferer. Even in the most agonizing moment she did not utter a cry but prayed in low, broken words. When the anguish passed endurance she became unconscious.

Bathed in sweat and devastated by suffering, Carvagno stood in the door of

the brightly lighted ward. The ghastly wide-open eyes of the patient were bright with the pearl-coloured film seen in the eyes of dead animals. Carvagno watched these eyes for the faintest trace of a wish which he might divine—hence his message to Italo.

When he was informed that the Senator's son was waiting, he struck his breast with his fist. Pulling himself together, he seized the young man by the hand, and brought him, without losing his hold, to the place where that act of life was in progress which is more terrible than death. All was silent, except for quiet, low-toned orders and the tinkle of instruments against glass. The doctors were still hoping to deliver the child without having recourse to the desperate expedient of section.

It was already three in the afternoon. Italo saw first the stone floor of the ward on which blood was swimming, he saw the outstretched body of a woman, the white thigh stained with blood, he saw the sunken head, the hanging hair, the suffering face of Bianca. . . .

At this moment the first cry broke from the lips of the woman. Had she felt the presence of Italo ? Again, more horrible than before, her agony came upon her.

On long, apparently endless breaths she uttered cry after cry. They were no plaintive cries, hardly cries of pain, but the strong battle cry of life against the evil powers that had wrought such devilry.

Italo's hand crushed the hand of the man whose wife he had loved. An inarticulate groan rose from his throat. The operating surgeon looked sternly at the two men who had come there against all rule, and Carvagno drew Italo into the anteroom.

Rhythmic and uninterrupted, hardly recognizable as human, the cries rang through the air.

Carvagno's heavy hand pressed upon the shoulder of the fainting boy who sank helplessly on his knees, his hand trailing on the floor. He saw standing over him the unrecognizable Mongolian visage of the doctor, swollen and red-eyed, streaming with tears in all its lines and wrinkles, the mouth distorted and idiotic. He heard the man's wailing voice, and the words reached him:

"Now you know what beasts we are, we men. Beasts, beasts ! Now you know it !"

5

On the way to Santa Catarina a thousand thoughts thronged the Maestro's mind. Slowly the unbelievable truth sank into his resisting consciousness; Wagner had died in the very hour when he, Verdi, had freed himself from the obsession of ten years, and had gone out to seek him with a free and unburdened heart.

In that even the voice of some mysterious power had spoken, but the meaning of the oracle remained hidden. What he knew of Richard Wagner's life passed in dim fantastic vision through his brain. Although he had hitherto avoided all knowledge of the dead man's music he had for many years been continually impelled to collect every anecdote or biographical sketch of Wagner that came his way, and eagerly to seize upon every word of his speech that was reported.

Out of the lean years in Paris, the voyage over northern seas in search of ballad lore, the street fighting in Dresden, the period of exile, the friendship with a crazy young king, the two marriages, the wild idea of establishing a theatre for his own work alone, the successes of Bayreuth—out of all its acts and sufferings he wove the story of this life whose stress and achievement loomed so monstrous and immeasurable in retrospect to the Maestro.

And now, just as he had been brought to bend quietly and submissively before that life, he had found himself rejoicing with a dark and shameful joy that its oppression had been lifted from him.

But what a futile reaction that joy had been ! Physically he might outlive Wagner but his work was dead while that of the other man would go on unchecked. The scourge had not been removed from him, but only the man—this man at whose death he had rejoiced an hour before.

Out of all these reflections a conviction grew upon the Maestro that somehow the world, his world, had completely changed. His thoughts surged on in other directions. Old plans, not yet practicable, recurred to him and took new shape and impetus in his mind—the hospital at Villanova, and another huge project, a home for aged musicians to which he meant to leave all the proceeds of his operas.

What is the meaning of the crowd of beggars before the churchyard gates ? Every time that death strikes down one, another realizes that he has been spared, and he is moved by a deed of charity to discharge his indebtedness to the powers that have shown him mercy. The finest and highest impulses of man rest upon a groundwork of corruption, and it was out of this primordial slime that the Maestro reared his resolutions now. They were fulfilled later to the last iota, for Verdi was a truth-loving man who did not break his word even to himself.

The Maestro found the Fischböck's door shut, and he knew immediately that something untoward had happened. Had the young people left suddenly and unexpectedly ? The possibility gave him a distinct shock of dismay.

He knocked at a neighbouring door which was opened by a haggard, middle-aged woman in untidy *déshabille*. The Maestro saw a large room before him, in which a score of children seemed to be waging a battle. Dust and noise were everywhere, the curtains were torn and awry, and sacred pictures in revolting colours hung crookedly on the walls.

Utterly forlorn amid the wild band he recognized little Hans Fischböck. Though the boy's eyes were staring widely-opened, he did not seem to understand what had happened to him, but stood there stupefied by the uproar.

In spite of his wretchedness a faint smile crept into the child's eyes as they met those of the childless man. But Hans did not come to him, he stood silent and motionless as if the new surroundings were a prison from which he could not move.

The woman broke into a flood of lamentations and protestations, obviously insincere. Early yesterday morning the misfortune had happened. The young German gentleman had fallen in a heap as he was leaving the house, and they couldn't bring him round. Dreadful, it was ! She had always warned them what would come of their bad food and irregular ways. She had known the poor things nearly a year now, and how Signor Fischböck had changed in that time, red cheeked and sturdy as he had been ! The doctors, stupid humbugging fools, knew nothing. She had told them of an old doctor she knew who could have cured him, but young people always thought they knew better. Agatha, poor helpless martyr, could do nothing with the young man who was killing himself with his senseless tramping about day and night without proper clothes. The way he went on was enough to kill anyone, sitting in an overcoat when the room was hot, and half naked when it was ice cold. Wasn't that a wicked way to behave ? "Taking his own life," she called it. But there—they were Germans, Protestants and unbelievers ! The poor soul was lying in hospital now. Heaven knew if he would ever come out again. She hoped to the Madonna—for she didn't hold with such wicked ways herself and despising holy church—that the judgment of God wouldn't fall on them. Perhaps the gentleman was a relation of the family ? He could trust her, she wasn't one who only talked about doing good. Little Giovanni—"come here, my angel"—was more to her than her own six. "Hold your tongues, you devils ! Fighting like that !" She had a hard time herself, but she was keeping him like a little prince, though she and her own might want. His mother thanked her every day upon her knees.

The Maestro cut short her loquacity with the quiet authority that stamped his intercourse with the people.

"You will feed the child well and care for him. Everything will be provided for you."

He hurried down the stairs without looking round; he could not bear to see the suffering look in the child's eyes again.

In the office at the entrance to the *Ospedale civico* he inquired for Carvagno, and was respectfully given the necessary information, an attendant accompanying him to point out the stair.

When he had gone up a few steps the Maestro had to stand still in sudden faintness. He realized how deeply the death of his great adversary had shaken him. His own life ebbed in him.

On the uppermost landing sat a young man who stared before him like a dying animal, seeing nothing. Italo's hair, always so carefully brushed, now strayed wildly over his forehead. Hearing the approach of someone in the shadow of the stairs he turned his head aside so as to be unobserved.

As the Maestro went down the resounding corridor, the sharp, sweetish odour of the clinic increased his depression. He had been directed to the women's wards, and nurses in grey uniforms and noiseless shoes were passing on the stone floors. A great white-painted door which seemed to lead to an operating theatre stood a little open, and from the distant interior came a long-drawn, piercing, almost rhythmic cry. Again the Maestro had to stand still and press his hand upon his heart. He recognized the terrible cry of a woman in labour, which no other sound resembles. The battle cry of a blinded, breathless recruit plunging forward into the battle of life with death.

Pale and stricken, he remembered Betteloni, the quack doctor, washing his hands, and saying: "That was a bad case, my boy. You see, that's how children come into the world." He thought of Margherita Barezzi, the trim, well-dressed girl who had played Haydn with him, the poor apprentice, and recalled the two nights when she had lain stripped and suffering before him, all her reserves torn away—she, so shamefast by nature, who would never undress except in the darkness. Like hers were the cries that came from that terrible place, behind those hard-hearted walls. Why had this horror been set upon the threshold of human life?

The weight of his thought bowed the man down more and more. In this piteous moment, he knew not why, he remembered again the kiss of Margherita Dezorzi, her perfume, the soft clinging of her body. But the aftertaste of that delight was strangely loathsome.

Suddenly the cries broke off abruptly. Were the woman's pains at an end? A doctor in a white overall appeared and looked very serious when the Maestro asked for Doctor Carvagno. He could not be seen. The name of Mathias Fischböck, however, was familiar, and he called a young assistant doctor to accompany the stranger to the ward where he lay.

Very respectfully the young physician complied. The face before him was vaguely familiar, and he tried to recall what he knew of it.

Fischböck! Oh, yes! A sad story! He was in the general ward at present, but they hoped to remove him as soon as a private room was at liberty. Primarius Carvagno had put his name down. Fischböck was a musician, he thought.

"Is his condition hopeful?"

"No. Unfortunately not. He has hardly a week to live."

"But how can that be? Two days ago, although he was feverish, he was upon his feet."

"The case is an unusual one. A suppressed form of phthisis. A long-seated miliary tuberculosis, that has been dormant for months, has suddenly become acute, and in the patient's weakened, feverish state, may be fatal in a few days' time. We go in here. I must ask you to remember the highly feverish, exhausted state of the patient and to make your visit very short."

The early winter dusk was already falling in the whitewashed sick ward. The air was hot. All those feverish bodies, rather than the stove in the corner, seemed to overheat the atmosphere. Clouds of tainted air rose up to the vaulted roof.

Along the walls twenty-two beds were ranged with a dark tablet over the head of each. Round the beds clustered circles of silent or whispering relatives who gazed awestricken at the patients. The visitors' hour was nearly over. The dark, low-voiced groups, that took no notice of each other and yet seemed ashamed of their indifference, made a sinister picture as they bent in growing embarrassment over their sick friends.

The weakness of the flesh was the only reality after all! How could a man spend the troubled years of his life in the service of the theatre, of opera?

The sight of the sick and dying awakens in us a deep uneasiness which is more than the mere dread of suffering and death. Man, the nomad of many strange worlds, temporarily domiciled, becomes restless and ashamed, like any wanderer, when he sees another preparing to set out on the journey again. It lies deep in our being, this wondering curiosity with which we regard all who force a barrier.

The Maestro had to subdue this sensation before he approached the sick man. Giuseppe Verdi had seen death many times since his little Icilio lay lifeless in his arms. All the circumstances of the last agony, the short, broken breaths, the long, terrifying pauses between them until at last they cease, the changing of the living, distorted features into the stiff, sculptured effigy of death, all these he had known, and the knowledge was part of his nature. These hours, rather than his moments of love and transport, clothed themselves in his music. *Miserere!* And they made it great.

The hour of death was awaited now. He felt lifted beyond himself, and a quiet, trustful serenity streamed from him as he laid his strong hand on the hand of the sick man.

The pinched, monkish features of Fischböck were more sharply accentuated than ever now that a sallow, earthy hue overspread his cheeks and lips, and his great brow no longer strained forward. He seemed to be forty now or older; it might have been his father, the organist and eccentric of Bitterfeld, that lay there. The hands with their unnaturally prominent bones at the wrist lay abandoned, like the motionless body under the counterpane, in utter weakness. His breathing was hurried, and a pulse raced in his neck, and in the eyes something unspoken struggled.

The Maestro bent over him, smiling.

"What misfortune is this, my dear Fischböck?"

The eyes of the sick man quieted.

"You are there, Herr Carrara? I have been expecting you for long."

The Maestro took the slack hand of Agatha in his own, and she roused herself to say a few words of thanks when she heard that he had seen little Hans.

His trust-inspiring strength flowed out to her.

"The young doctor who brought me here assured me that you will have a private room this evening. It is like a barrack here. Now, my friend, how do you feel?"

"Oh, well! Better than I have been for a long time."

"Then we have no cause for uneasiness. It is only to be expected that so much fever would weaken the strongest constitution. But the doctor, whom I asked for his real opinion, says that you are already beginning to recover. Have patience a little and you will soon be convalescent. In a few weeks you will be enjoying life more than ever."

"Yes, Herr Carrara! I have no anxiety about myself. I'm all right. Only my blood roars; it roars in my ears. No matter! It will burn out, it will destroy that vile, beastly, loathsome rhythm! Then I shall be free."

Agatha gave the Maestro a look to end the conversation.

"I have come to say good-bye, my dear Fischböck. I am going away."

Fischböck kept his eyes closed.

"Then we are lost," sighed Agatha—it was the first direct word that she had dared to address to the Maestro.

"That you are not ! For I have good news for you, my friends."

The grey face of the sick man turned towards him on the pillow.

"The publisher to whom I sent the copy of your music is not such an old fogy as I am. He is quite struck with your efforts. He proposes to print all your work and has sent you a cheque for it through me. He wants that to be an advance upon the contract which he will make with you for the whole of your output. I will cash this cheque for you—it is for ten thousand francs."

The Maestro did not look at the dying man, but took the money out of his pocket-book with a matter-of-fact air, counted it and handed it to Agatha. The idea had come to him on the spur of the moment how to make his gift. Like a man well pleased with a bargain he put his pocket-book back in his coat again.

"I congratulate you, Fischböck, on your success. It came as a surprise to me. But that was my own fault; I shall know better for the future. When once your music has appeared it will, no doubt, astonish the world. A publisher, snapping it up like that, must know what he is about. All my objections are overruled. I have only to ask you on the publisher's account to have patience for a little, and he will come and see you personally and arrange the terms of the contract. He knows your address. So have patience !"

Mathias raised himself slowly in the bed. Lifted from the pillow, his face, which had grown very small, showed no sign of doubt or suspicion. All his strength was gathered up in one triumphant look at his wife:

"You see, Agatha !"

His head fell back.

The man in the next bed also raised himself a little. In the gathering darkness the Maestro saw a white, haggard face, the face of an actor. This impersonal visage, the mask of all second-rate players, singers or stage performers, stared at the Maestro and beyond him. Agatha sat holding the money in her hand; the stiff, rustling paper seemed to frighten her.

Mathias did not appear to remember at the moment that the money would be the salvation of his family. In his weak, feverish voice he asked:

"And he will come, the publisher ?"

"Be sure of that. He will not let the chance slip."

"When will he come ?"

"When his business in Milan is finished. In three or four weeks. There is no hurry. He knows your address."

Fischböck smiled with almost malicious pleasure to himself.

"You see, Agatha ? I am not such an idiot after all. I was right, people will come to me. They scent it. I have not had to wait such an extraordinary time for them. You understand something about music, Herr Carrara, you will follow me. All the famous work of our so-called classicists and moderns—nothing but triads and simple chords mixed up together—abominable concords ! Opera rubbish, damned opera rubbish ! Weak pathos, weak sentiment, slosh, not a single true tone. Opera ! But music should be something as eternal as the universe. You do not want to live, any of you, but only to enjoy. Patience ! In three weeks I shall be myself again. You have done well, my dear Herr Carrara !"

"It is quite true, my friend. We only know a very little portion of the great firmament of music. Triads, basta ! They must serve for me, but you know the new constellations. Now, you must keep quiet again. You are talking too much."

"Will he take all that I have done, in this edition—everything ?"

"Everything."

"And it will be performed ?"

"Certainly it will be performed."

"Carrara, my friend, I will write a chorus in your honour, a Motet, for this performance ! You will recognize how simple it all is . . . how easy to understand. . . ."

He spoke wearily and the Maestro stood up.

"The best thing you can do now is to lay your head back and enjoy your success quietly."

In the darkness the face of the actor leant far out over the side of the bed. The young doctor came in, the groups of visitors had long disappeared. Verdi's eyes dwelt on the picture of the dying man whom he would not see again. The colour of the twilight was in the Gothic, sculptured face. Again came the thought: "There is a great man lost in him and nobody will ever know of it."

His hand rested in farewell on the fevered forehead, on the poor disordered locks of dry, blond hair. Then to Agatha he said:

"I will write to you from Genoa about everything. About everything."

The young doctor made a beckoning gesture. An attendant lighted a few gas jets, and as the light slowly penetrated every corner subdued exclamations came from the patients.

"Courage, friend !"

The Maestro uttered these words, and did not look on the German again. The picture would fade, must fade. His own face, the face of a wise old workman, grew very sad.

His steps were slow and hesitating as he went through the door without taking leave of Frau Fischböck. As he disappeared, the sick stage-player raised himself in his bed and whispered enthusiastically, below his breath:

"Verdi !"

But no one heard the name.

There was still some light in the corridor, and the heavy steps of unseen people resounded. The attendant closed the door of the deserted sick ward without looking back, for there were no tips to be expected here. The Maestro went slowly on, but before he reached the stairs he felt a light hand touch him. He did not look round at once. He felt that something timid and gentle was behind him, then he turned his head and saw Agatha Fischböck.

The plain, colourless face, with its pale eyebrows and lashes, was scarcely reognizable. Sorrow had made it strong.

"I know who you are."

The Maestro could not find a word in reply. He saw that the woman held in her hand a photograph of him that had appeared against his will. She spoke hastily in short sentences as if she feared her courage would not last.

"My husband must die, very soon, I know. You hardly know us. You have done more for us, for him, than his own parents could ! The story about the publisher is not true. But he will die happy. He cannot thank you. You must know that. You are Giuseppe Verdi."

Her voice stumbled through the sentences with painful pauses. The Maestro felt as if he must find some hiding-place. He, too, spoke shortly and brokenly:

"I want your child to grow up happily. Write to me ! Or come ! Come to Genoa, to Saint Agatha. I live there ! I will provide for the child's future !"

The woman hardly heard the words. Her emotion almost overcame her. It was not gratitude but something far deeper. The man, his glory, his greatness ! Her teeth chattered together uncontrollably. She broke into wild weeping and fell before the Maestro. She had no words, she pressed his hand against her face:

"Giuseppe Verdi, in our house . . . I know you . . . always . . . beautiful."

She kissed his hand, and tore herself wildly away.

He fled.

The Maestro stood in a doorway in the darkness. Out in the distance he saw the silhouette of the buildings in the lagoon over which a grey light still lay.

But as he stood there between the darkness and the twilight a strange experience came to him.

Clearly and distinctly he felt that he was not standing there in the door of the hospital, but sitting, as he did in the evenings, before his Erard in the Palazzo Doria, improvising.

The moment of double consciousness passed immediately.

Turning his back on the smell of carbolic and the atmosphere of the sick wards, he filled his lungs with pure air.

6

"He came to us as comes the light
That breathes through the encircling sphere
Of air, its universal grace.
The beauty of his life, its might,
Its loneliness—
High as the heavens stood forth. And clear
As heaven's choir to hear,
He drew his music from the hearts
Of men who dream and hope and fall.
He loved and wept for all."

After Gabriele D'Annunzio.

The New Embankments of Venice, as they are called, have none of the features either of a new suburb or an ornamental sea-front. The gilded face of the city smiles, charming and careless, to the south, but those Fondamenti facing the desolate north reveal the wretched background of life. Here Venice, like an aged *diva* at midnight, when there are no longer eyes to admire her plumed and painted beauty, admits the truth and looks with disgust upon her own grey and dismal ruin.

The dreary city beach extends for some miles from the arsenal to the Sacca della Misericordia, a desolate, poverty-stricken quarter lying round the harbour. The great barrack of San Francesco della Vigna, the giant cylinder of the gas-works, the walls of the hospital with their grated windows stare out over the sea. Even the water here is not the multi-coloured, happily dancing lagoon of San Marco. It is soiled and discoloured by unsavoury discharges, and a hundred sandbanks raise their unlovely lines above the surface. It is a lagoon of corruption, a true Stygian Sea, and upon its livid waves float the dim shadows cast by the living, smiling upper world—sickness, refuse and flowing blood. Even nature seems to have chosen this place for her cesspool, for not only rotten beams, nondescript rags and offal swim there, but not infrequently the bloated carcasses of animals swirl horribly round and round upon themselves.

The largest of the sandbanks, enclosed in walls, heightened, widened and planted with cypresses, forms the island of San Michele, its lonely belfry piercing the discouraged air. This graveyard islet naturally forms the outpost of this quarter in the northern waters.

As Verdi left the hospital a perceptible weight seemed to fall from his shoulders. He might have been leaving it convalescent, after weeks of illness, for his knees trembled and all his bones jarred at every step. People passed him. Marching groups of soldiers. Workmen. Poor people. More and more people. The Venetians of this side seemed different from the Venetians of the lagoon di San Marco. Only in the faces of passing lovers was a spark of the grace of life visible.

Two pictures stood out clear and significant under the gathering evening clouds. From the opposite bank of the Beggar's Canal across to the island graveyard a high wooden bridge had been erected and left standing since All Souls' Day. On the long narrow platform that stretched out through the squalor towards the dim island swimming in the mist, the figures of people carrying lanterns and candles stood high and shadowy above the lagoon. Some

great funeral service seemed to be in progress and the clanging of bells filled the murky air.

A little farther to the eastward a large cargo boat lay anchored in the stagnant water. Lights were already burning by the crane, and work was still in full swing. Through the creaking of ropes and chains and the heavy snorting of the engine, the Maestro heard the rhythmic shouts of the labourers ringing like a cry for help repeated again and again out of the furious storm of labour that raged around the boat.

The lantern-bearing figures wavered on the bridge, and the wayfarers who passed in the dusk were strangely silent and sad-eyed. From a subterranean water exit of the hospital a barge appeared steering for San Michele. Along the sides of the vessel the Maestro could see the plain, undraped coffins ranged in rows like barrels or boxes. It was the hour when the great hospital lightened itself of its ghastly ballast upon that funereal island.

Wearily the Maestro's thoughts searched for a name: Was it Wagner? Was it Fischböck? He could not find the name.

An oppression fell upon him, blotting out his self-consciousness, and he shuddered, remembering the experience of the night. But the power that possessed him was not an evil one. Although all his body was racked, and his breathing oppressed, he knew that he had nothing to fear.

If this was death, it was also revelation.

The old man in the dark brown overcoat clenched his fists in unaccountable emotion, flung out his arms and pushed his hat back from his brow. With a gasping, half-uttered cry, he leant against the wall, like a wounded man, his bearded chin bowed upon his chest. He closed his eyes, blinded by tears, his arms stretched vaguely outwards in the darkness, and his body was shaken with suppressed sobs. Suddenly from his lips came a short, involuntary ejaculation, fervent and meaningless:

"Vendetta!"

Whence this word came the Maestro could not have told. It meant nothing. It was not a cry of horror at that day's sacrifice of life, it was neither an impulse of reaction against all the experiences he had passed through, nor a response to the overwhelming melancholy with which the hour, the shore, the bridge and the passing people filled him.

In the encompassing evening the sad-faced people moved along with blind, upturned faces, silent, or whispering in monosyllables. No one laughed or jested with another. The farther he penetrated into the town the fiercer surged the overpowering storm within him. He passed on neither seeing nor hearing. Once he collided with a wagon drawn by four horses and the oaths of the driver suddenly gave place to respectful greeting.

In the doorways stood women with children in their arms, and an infant stretched out its hand as he passed. A priest robed in his vestments smiled on them with absent, wandering eyes.

The Maestro reached his room where Beppo awaited him. Everything had been attended to, the tickets for the journey secured. The servant began to recount the doings of the day, but broke off before he reached the end of the first sentence. His master's face was blank, the eyes usually so clear and exacting noted nothing. He did not understand, but involuntarily he touched the hand of his old master, and went out on tiptoe.

The Maestro sank into a chair without taking off his overcoat.

"Vendetta. Vendetta means Vengeance!"

As a candle in a dark room only serves to render the gloom deeper so the precise meaning of this mysterious word only darkened his mind.

Vendetta is not a word, it is a forgotten faculty. More, it is that mystic moment of love that comes but seldom in life and lasts only for the moment.

Verdi sat on motionless in the darkening room. He neither smiled nor wept nor dreamed. He was passive as earth under the falling rain.

7

"I believe in Inspiration, but you in production. I seek to rouse enthusiasm of which you have no true perception. For me art, whatever its form, never appears as *speech, as arrogant artistic or theoretical speculation* which are your be-all and end-all." —*From Verdi's letter breaking with Paris and Parisian opera.*

The celebration by which the Senator, inspired by his wine, had planned to prove to Verdi that, in spite of Wagner and the changed times, he was still the darling of the Italian people, should have taken place at eight o'clock on this thirteenth of February. Celebration is too big a word. After consultation with the authorities concerned, it resolved itself into nothing more than an arrangement that, at a certain hour, the Sindaco, three town councillors, Count Boni, the President of the Marcello Lyceum, and some of the principal professors of that Academy should wait upon the Maestro in his hotel and lay at his feet the greetings and gratitude of the City of Venice for his work and his life. After a short discussion the idea of presenting him with the freedom of the city was abandoned; this could only be done by the sanction of a full meeting of the Senate, and for this there was no time.

As the hour for this function drew nearer the Senator's uneasiness and doubts increased. He began to realize that in his concern for Verdi's honour he had set in motion something that was contrary to his friend's whole character and for which he might blame him bitterly.

Verdi, who at this period of his life hated and avoided all ovation, who wrote urgent letters adjuring people not to offer him public honours, and opposed the setting up of his bust in the foyer of the Scala as a piece of bad taste, had put the Senator upon his honour not even to reveal the fact that he was in Venice.

The old revolutionary grew hot and cold by turns. Ten times he left the house and as often returned without any purpose in his mind. He did not speak for more than half an hour to Renzo, whose visit had taken him by surprise. His heart misgave him sorely. If it had been possible he would have cancelled all the arrangements, so uneasy did he become as he thought of Giuseppe Verdi's implacable objection to publicity. What manner would he assume to those frock-coated gentlemen—the harsh sarcasm of his younger days or the good-tempered irony of his later years? Would he take the affair in good part or openly show his annoyance? This thing that had figured in the Senator's easily inflamed imagination as the symbolic tribute of the whole Italian people might easily turn into something dangerous and unpleasant.

The good man was sadly perplexed.

About seven o'clock came Beppo with a barely legible, pencilled note from Verdi that changed the whole aspect of the case.

In warm, strangely moved phrases the Maestro informed his friend that they would not see each other again, that he was returning by the next train to Milan and to Genoa, without shaking him again by the hand. Old men, he said, should avoid leave-takings, each of which may possibly be their last. These days in Venice had been an attempt to complete a certain piece of work in surroundings that were altogether strange and in solitude. Although the attempt had failed, he would not say that the time had been wasted.

"My heart is very heavy. Here, because I have been freer than anywhere else, I have seen and realized things that I could not otherwise have recognized. It may be that anxiety and sadness are the natural accompaniments of age."

The Maestro closed the letter with expressions of affection such as he could rarely bring himself to write, and the Senator's disappointment was mingled with relief that his fears had been rendered groundless.

At five minutes to eight "Verdi's representative upon earth" as the Senator had been called, entered the vestibule of the hotel. As a revolutionary he despised evening dress and wore a long coat buttoned up to the throat in which

his majestic figure stood out from all others in strongly marked distinction. The garment was a happy choice, doing equal justice to his distinguished appearance and his loyalty to the old principles.

A more correctly attired group of men had already been waiting for a little while, and the proprietor and personnel of the hotel were drawn up in two curious and respectful lines. The news had just been passed round discreetly that the unknown gentleman in No. 2 had paid his bill and left an hour before.

The Senator's manner towards other men was a mixture of hastiness and importance, at once overbearing and friendly. He would have made many enemies had not the pure and remarkable record of his life induced people to overlook his brusqueness. He stormed in now, breathless and red in the face, as he always became in such moments, and his hurried impulsive greetings were returned with grave propriety by the representatives of a day that had long rejected all his impracticable and unbusiness-like ideals.

The Senator shook the Mayor's hand, nodded carelessly to the music-loving Count, bowed cordially to the other members of the deputation and invited the company to accompany him to the Maestro's room. The proprietor, conscious that this was a great moment in the history of his hotel, came forward to light up the "Royal apartment" with his own hand, and retired backward from the room when all the company had entered.

The Senator paused to recover his breath. During the pause, he was conscious, as an old politician and public speaker, of the impression his magnetic physique produced upon an audience. He, the man of '48, Mazzini's friend, was immeasurably and perceptibly superior to this upstart company.

"Gentlemen," he began, "as the fathers of this city and the patrons of Art, you have assembled here to greet and to honour a great man, the greatest man in the Italian nation. I have, however, to inform you that Giuseppe Verdi has already left, or is at this moment leaving, our city."

An outburst of exclamations and questions interrupted him, and he continued—

"I confess that, disappointed as I am that we cannot offer our thanks and esteem to the great man in person, a load has been lifted from my heart. For, my friends, our Maestro is not a man to be played with. He hates all official celebrations and speeches more than anything on earth. God knows how he would have received us."

The Sindaco threw an angry look at the Senator, who had evidently forgotten that he himself had been responsible for the offer of this unacceptable honour. Full of the importance of his position he considered that no Italian, however distinguished he might be, could pretend to despise an honour bestowed on him by the Chief Magistrate of the City of Venice.

The Sindaco, whose crude, bureaucratic mind knew and cared little about music, was really relieved to be spared the ordeal of making a speech on the subject. The company looked at each other in some perplexity. They had come there, pompously important, in full regalia; a curious crowd—ever ready to embrace an occasion for cheering—was waiting before the hotel in expectation of an ovation, and they were faced with the necessity of finding a way out of the situation decently if not impressively.

The instigator of the catastrophe seemed very little perturbed. The Senator moved about the room with a cheerful air, and, taking up a position in front of the ten delegates, he again allowed effect of his commanding presence to be felt while he assumed an oratorical attitude. The city fathers breathed sighs of relief, they knew the efficacy of a speech in saving a situation in which there was nothing to be done.

"An hour ago," began the Senator quietly, "Giuseppe Verdi left this room. Nothing has been altered or put in order since his departure. But looking round you, gentlemen, can you detect the least disorder, or any sign that a man of genius has lived and worked here for weeks, eating, sleeping, writing?

"I can assure you all that he, the most ardent and arduous man I have ever

met, never so much as rumpled the bedclothes in his sleep. Fire and self-control! That combination was the secret of Giuseppe Verdi's greatness.

"The romantic legend of to-day has created a false picture of the artist's nature; a Beethoven spitting on the wall; the Bohemian, debauched, inconsequent, irresponsible; the over-sensitive, nervous, illogical imbecile! What Art can be born of such natures? In one word, it is the idolizing of evil; the worship of perversity? In literature, for example, what do men honour and demand to-day? That in which the basest things in life are set highest. That is what pleases them. And when do they consider music to be beautiful and important, and profound—to be great Art? When it is filled with fanatical hatred. There is a spirit of evil in men to-day that impels them to seek each other's injury. In our Maestro there lived such strength as rendered all the allurements of corruption vain! The hotel here will have to complain of no damage to its rooms or furniture. Every circumstance of his stay here bears witness to the noble life of this man. Laugh at me, my friends, if you please. It is true, I am only an old dreamer. Since we creatures of earth no longer believe in gods, we have to make ourselves a God among men. And who is a God to us? He in whom we have never discovered deceit. Yes, and in this greatest of men there was no shadow of deceit.

"It has been my good fortune in life to have known many heroic men, as you all know. I can say with truth that no one knew Mazzini more intimately than I. I have fought by the side of Garibaldi, Rosalino, Bixio, and Hegedüs. But gallant and great as they were, much straw burnt in all their fires. Even my pure and noble master Mazzini was not free from vanity. And now I will tell you why Verdi is a god to me. There is no other man on earth so absolutely free from vanity. I know no living creature who has the power of judging himself so fearlessly and inexorably as he. His nature is a completely objective one, he is clay in his own hands. How else could it have been possible for him, who rose from the darkest illiteracy of the twenties, to have carved out the career that he has made for himself? What constant war he waged against himself. Year after year! Work after work! Giuseppe Verdi is the most god-like pinnacle that mankind has yet attained. Both mankind and Verdi will outlive this dark and cloudy day."

The Senator glowed. His phlegmatic listeners strained every muscle in their attention. The rising inflection of his voice left them waiting for his closing phrase. But he went on anew:

"Had Verdi never written a note he would still have been great. But because he is so great, his melody runs in the veins of all mankind. What other composer can say that his melodies have thrilled India and Egypt as they have thrilled Russia and Germany? And think of his choral music, his crowning triumph! The choruses of his first opera are a marvel and a miracle!

"Alone in his time he attained perfect proportion, and it is this that has made his chorale so unrivalled. For he is not one, he is all in one. That is the key to Art.

"His choruses! To me they are not the trivial street singer's tunes, that you, Count Boni, and the other Wagnerians, are pleased to call them. No, the virtue and the simplicity of humanity are there, out of which all that is good in life flows. Modern art attempts to render the banal complex so that its banality may not appear. But our Maestro has shown the simplicity of the mightiest and most complex things. He is the last of the great Folk-singers, the singer of humanity, a noble anachronism in this century." A Greek quotation came into the Senator's mind. He tried to suppress it, but the philologist in him was too strong.

τὸν βίον
Ἡ φύσις ἔδωκε, μὴ τὸ καλῶς ζῆν ἡ τέχνη.

" 'Art teaches how to live truly and beautifully,' says this line of an unknown poet. Does modern art teach us any truly beautiful way of life? It will soon

be nothing but the efforts of a score of ambitious coteries to impress and outdo each other. Originality is the magic word that thrills them, and they do not see that their originality is nothing but their unbounded egoism. Oh, how undervalued to-day is the author of Nabucco and 'Aïda'! One of our young men of letters who has coined the phrase 'Genius and madness are one,' has denied the genius of Giuseppe Verdi on the ground that he was too sane. Son of a dog! There you have the essential depravity of this epoch that condemns all strength and sanity. Mental cripples, neurotics, criminals, it is from these that we take our art to-day. They will guide the people! But who is the people? Is it ministers, deputies, generals, literary bandits, petticoats, idiots and peripatetic consumptives? No, no! I thank you! Thou are the last, my Verdi!"

Abruptly the Senator took up his hat. He had had enough. The company, too, welcomed the close of this high-flown discourse which they had found hard to follow.

Count Boni came up to the Senator:

"My honourable friend," he said in a piqued tone, "you referred to me sarcastically as a Wagnerian. It is true, I am, but at the same time I esteem our Verdi highly. Your sarcasm was not very well timed, for only a few hours ago Richard Wagner died here in our city. Our Sindaco here has now to decide in consultation with the family what form the obsequies shall take."

The poor Sindaco looked very uncomfortable, half softened, half obstinate. All these artistic responsibilities were too heavy for him.

The Senator only boomed some reply and disappeared. He thought sadly of his friend whom he would perhaps never see again, and after whom, like an ideal, he longed constantly from a distance.

The crowd in front of the hotel waited obstinately for their entertainment. They wanted someone to cheer. All sorts of famous names were bandied about from mouth to mouth but the Maestro's name was not among them.

Suddenly one of the know-alls remembered that a well-known politician, newspaper editor and racing celebrity had stayed in the hotel the night before. A hum of satisfaction ran through the crowd. As the deputation came out and entered their gondolas the people, imagining that this personage had been receiving some civic honour, began to shout his name with wild acclamations.

8

While this farce was proceeding on the Riva degli Schiavoni the Maestro sat in an obscure *trattoria* swallowing an unpalatable meal. He hardly knew how he had come there and did not taste the food he was eating. He had sent Beppo on to the station and in an hour he would leave by the evening train for Milan. After the waiter had gone the Maestro sat with half-closed eyes, unconscious of his grimy surroundings. He did not see the four dilapidated tables with their besmirched covers and benches, the loud-voiced customers or the black-haired *padrona* who laughed and jested brazenly behind the buffet stained with oil and wine.

As the life and people of Venice receded farther and farther from him, one scene stood before him constantly; the high wooden bridge leading to San Michele and the company carrying their funeral lights to the place of burial. Foremost in his mind was the moment when, out of the horror of all his experiences, the strange barbaric word "Vendetta" loosed itself in his consciousness.

It was a word that no longer answered to any living reality of to-day. He hated the fierceness and harshness of the word—the forerunner of an inspiration —that pressed upon him from all sides, from the street, from the rooms he entered, from the people he met, catching him by the throat and weakening him to tears. It was out of a similar meaningless cry which broke from his lips in one of the crises of youth that the first strains of "Nabucco" had taken shape. Once more this voice had spoken, against which the forces and resolu-

tion of the mind had no power. Once more and for the last time. Yet something quiet and tender stirred in the deep exhaustion of his nerves—a sense of rest, of happiness.

It was not with gratitude that he recognized the voice of music speaking within him again, but the sting of renunciation ceased to wound him.

Verdi went out into a narrow street that was unfamiliar to him. Face to face, for a hundred years these tall ranked houses had stared at each other and, like human beings, never learnt to know each other. A single gas lamp burned drearily. The Maestro raised his head and looked at the distant empty night sky, that stretched over all. He was not superstitious, but something moved him to justify himself before the emancipated spirit of the Other.

"For many years you have troubled and beset me. Or was it, perhaps, not you, but the times, myself, my own doubts, to which I gave your name, that called to me from all sides ? No matter now ! I have let myself be bewildered, weakly and unmanfully. I have evaded the encounter; I have called to you and fled from you. The attempt to meet you has failed.

"And to-day, I have even rejoiced with an evil joy that I still live while you are dead. Never, never while I live, shall I forgive myself for that lapse. But you will forgive. For you are dead and I am but as ten thousand other old men are. Peace be with us both."

As the Maestro was trying to find the way out of this street, two figures approached, their steps keeping time with almost unnatural precision on the pavement.

First came a tall man in a huge cylindrical hat, carrying a tall stick with an almost military air. Behind him a second, much feebler figure, holding a lantern high.

"What a piece of ostentation," thought the Maestro, "for a servant to follow his master with a lantern in these days of gas lighting." And he did not step aside.

Then he recognized the Marchese Gritti, who, since he never gave place to anyone, stood still. The proud carriage of the centenarian did not fail of its effect. Verdi took off his hat, bowing.

The birdlike eyes woke out of the waking sleep that was the Marchese's life, and began to search the face of this mere mortal. They found what they sought and the great hat was removed with an impressive gesture. He kissed his thumbs gallantly as he had learned to do when he was Modena's Secretary at the Vienna Congress, and cried:

"I recognize you. The renowned Maestro ! The past comes back to me ! One still remains in Venice ?"

The Maestro, surprised at this apparition, said a word or two, and the clear, proud voice went on: "I congratulate myself !"

Verdi uttered an expression of regret that the Marchese's unique collection had been destroyed.

"They will be replaced."

He did not doubt that years enough remained at his disposal to carry out the impossible task of replacing the destroyed collection. Verdi, the doubter, stared in astonishment at such confidence.

"You have been to your box in the theatre as usual, Marchese ? Were they playing in La Fenice or in the Rossini to-night ?"

Gritti turned to François.

"Where was the performance ?"

"In the Rossini theatre, your Excellency."

"And what ?"

" 'The Secret Marriage,' your Excellency."

The Marchese was extraordinarily pleased at this information.

"The Maestro will be well aware that Domenico Cimarosa was a friend of mine. He died eighty years ago."

And pursuing this triumphant statement, he continued:

"His masterly work is not understood now. They disinter it, but they cannot perform it. That is all that the immortality of fame amounts to."

And after a pause he added vaguely:

"Absolutely."

The face, on which neither hair nor eyelashes remained, came closer.

"Does the great Maestro know why all new operas are so bad?"

"I should very much like to find out."

"They write all the music much too slow. It is bad taste to show so much dejection. Music ought to be quick."

With this affirmation the audience came to an end. The automaton moved on, the lantern swinging from the aged but human hand of François.

The Maestro stood still, reflecting:

"How is it? The great musician of the future is dead. A boy in his twenties who believes that he has supplanted all modern music is dead. But this man who knew Cimarosa outlives them all, and hankers after the skipping melodies of the last century. What a farce that a single hour should contain all these contradictions!"

On the next landing stage Verdi took the steamboat for the station. It was the last for the day, and was crowded with figures carrying bundles and packages.

The Maestro stood well forward and let the wind play on his face. He looked for the Palazzo Vendramin. The pile of the building rose heavy and desolate before him. All its windows were dark except two. One was brightly lighted, in the other only a mere glimmer showed. The house looked weary and broken in the darkness as if death were not only a misfortune but a failure.

The Maestro's eyes followed the dim barely distinguishable glimmer of light as long as it was visible.

Then he went down among the crowd of passengers, work-stained, chattering, quick-witted people returning from their occupations in the islands to their homes on the mainland. He closed his eyes, and in his weariness it seemed as if an element, akin to the water around him, was closing over his unconscious head.

In that moment Giuseppe Verdi left Venice and all that belonged to it behind him for ever.

AFTER-PIECE

1

"What is left for me now in the long days at Saint Agatha? To live alone with the fruit of my labour was my chief joy, but now it is no longer mine, that work . . ."—*Verdi to Boito on the day of the Othello première.*

GIUSEPPE VERDI'S stay in Venice remained a secret. The few persons who met him kept silence, and so none of his more or less well-informed biographers seem to have been aware of this sojourn, neither Monaldi, Perinello, Checchi, Pizzi, Resasco nor Bragagnolo.

Verdi himself never mentioned the excursion, even tried to conceal it, for he was ashamed of its strange and astonishing circumstances. Vigna died the month after he had left Venice; two years later the Senator and the Maestro met again in Milan, but their pleasure in this meeting was spoilt by the Senator's jealousy of the circle of true friends who surrounded Verdi.

The Maestro never heard anything further of the Fischböcks. He wrote to Agatha immediately from Genoa, but his letter remained unanswered. Years after he received the photograph of a twelve-year-old boy in an envelope bearing the postmark of a small Austrian town, but it was not accompanied by a word of writing or even a name. He knew that this must be Hans, but in a sudden fit of nervous irritation he pushed the picture into an out-of-the-way drawer.

In spite of all his self-distrust, the unexpected, the unhoped-for had happened. His ten-years' incapacity was ended; the crisis was passed, and the shadow that had eclipsed his powers had cleared away. In the moment when, beside the Stygian lagoon, among a grey crowd of people oppressed by the horror of life, the word Vendetta sounded in his ears, the ban had been lifted. Naturally the flow of life back into his paralysed powers did not take place so abruptly or so dramatically. But in the following weeks his long walks to Acquasola began to be filled with more and more insistent strains of music. It was music that rang in his mind now, not a pictured page of notes as during the fruitless labours upon Lear. And the strangest thing of all had happened: Verdi now believed in himself.

The day soon came when further resistance was impossible. A piece of music stood on the piano—wild, rude and vibrating, a real, powerful cabaletta like those of the stormy days of Attila and the Battle of Legnano. The Maestro laughed in astonishment as he sat at the piano and tried over this wild song to which he had himself set some words. It embodied that inarticulate impression "Vendetta" which had come to him in Venice, later it was to be known as Othello's great farewell:

"Farewell, thou tranquil mind,
Farewell, content and thoughts of fame."

And in a second variation the famous vow,

"Witness, ye marble heavens."

For Boito's hour too had struck, and the Maestro had decided, with a thousand reservations and conditions, to set his Othello to music. He was deeply conscious of the unselfishness of the young poet and musician who thus resigned the right to compose the music for his own masterpiece. And in the following year, when several scenes had already been written, he begged the musician Boito to take back the work of Boito the poet!

The three years which he spent on Othello were years of unclouded happiness. He was no longer over-driven as in his early days by the restless desire to see the work finished, nor did he suffer the agonies of doubt and disgust over every page that had marked the years he spent upon Lear. He enjoyed the sense of mastery for the first time, no difficulty presented itself which he could not successfully master, no obstacle over which he did not soar triumphantly.

Contemporaries relate how the old man has been seen, in those years, standing under a gas-lamp in the evening jotting down ideas in his note-book, happily absorbed and unconscious of his surroundings.

He loved the score of Othello so much that he dreaded and postponed the hour of its completion which would rob him of its happy companionship. "Poor Othello," he wrote as he sent the last act to be copied.

On the evening that this calamity happened his temper became insufferable. He stormed through the house, violently finding fault with the furniture that had served him for twenty years. Everything was in the wrong place, it must all be re-arranged in the morning. He tried to find a book, but, of course, someone had stolen it as they stole his Havana cigars last week. The dinner gave him a fresh field for sarcasm. The ravioli was uneatable, the cook must be sent for. Tears flowed. Peppina lost her temper. Ancient grievances and recriminations were revived. With the last remnants of her patience the poor wife sobbed:

"Nobody knows the sort of man you are. God grant you may never write another opera."

"What a touching faith in Providence!" sneered the Maestro.

This was more than the pious Peppina could bear. She left the room.

These dissensions upset their usual evening game of cards for quite half an hour. But peace was restored at last.

2

"Glory be to him, the deathless, all subduing and serene!"—*Giosuè Carducci.*

The storms of winter in which Othello was produced had passed and spring assuaged the trouble and anxiety with which the theatre fills the air.

There were visitors at Saint Agatha: Boito and Giulio Ricordi, the two men most closely associated with the Maestro. They had dined on the terrace and drunk their black coffee. The guests were becoming restless, for it was nearly seven o'clock and they had to reach the nearest station, Fiorenzuola-Arda, in two hours to catch the Milan train. Their vacation was at an end.

The Maestro had long cherished the plan of the visit that was now over. He meant to accompany his friends a little way, as far as the house of his land steward, for whom he had a commission. Peppina, who escorted their guests through the willows of the park, took leave of them there.

Verdi sat in the back seat of the carriage waving aside the protests of the two other men. They did not speak now. Under the tall poplar avenue they traversed the sober landscape of the plain of Lombardy where the May crops were springing fresh and vigorous and the pollarded elms stood in gnarled outline against the sky. The sun was beginning to set, and its rays were reflected in the many streams that intersected the fruitful fields. At intervals the Maestro silently pointed out a farmsteading, a reservoir, or the tall chimneys of a factory, all of which belonged to Saint Agatha and were of his creation. As they passed his horse-breeding stables and riding school he became positively excited. His heart was in the care of his horses.

A hundred yards from the farm he stopped the carriage and sprang out. With a brief farewell to his friends he strode away, a long shadow stretching behind him.

"There's age and infirmity for you !" said Boito, as they smilingly watched the Maestro disappear. They were both about the same age, in the early forties and full of the contained energy of the prime of life.

The melancholy charm of the evening held them spell-bound. Giulio Ricordi leant his head back, the head not of a merchant but of an aristocrat and a scholar, for Giulio was the heir of a great line. After a pause he turned to Boito.

"Have you ever come really near to him ?"

Before he answered the shadows cleared from Boito's strong English physiognomy.

"Near to him ? That does not matter. He is the man whom I love most in all the world."

"You are right, Boito. But why do we love him so ? He is reserved, hard, uncompromising even to rudeness, he takes no great interest in others, or if he does, conceals it, and yet one loves him, as you say, more than any other man on earth."

"Perhaps it is the charm of his purity ?"

"What do you call purity, exactly ?"

"Singleness of mind, innocence—the unspoilt, childlike soul in him."

Ricordi did not seem satisfied, he pressed his chin on his walking-stick.

"As a publisher, my absurd duties bring me much into contact with great men. Most of them are very stiff and distant, and take a very lofty tone. But I tell you this, I often feel myself impaired and ravaged when they have left, while Verdi, the hard-headed old rustic, leaves me refreshed. In his company I am at my best."

Boito smiled. "I will attempt an analysis of greatness for you," he said. "There is prophetic and there is Homeric genius. Beware of the prophets ! They are man-eaters, proselytizers, fame-seekers and tyrants . . ."

"Is the Maestro not a tyrant ?"

"Never for himself or his own things. He is one of those fools who believe in justice !"

"Then he belongs to the Homeric side?"

"Not that either. My analysis has gone to the devil at the first test. Do you know why Verdi is so modest? There is a secret at the bottom of his soul which no one can fathom. There are no words for it. Something loftily, transcendentally maternal. Pah! that sounds like a German pamphlet. But 'love' is not precise enough. Well, perhaps you understand me."

They came to a village. Since it was Sunday the municipal band of fourteen men was playing in the market-place. When they caught sight of the carriage from Saint Agatha, in which the Maestro himself might be sitting, they began to play the chorus from Nabucco—"*Va pensiero*." The drums crashed furiously, and the bystanders hurrahed. Like the equipage of a sovereign the carriage rode the waves of music and spontaneous enthusiasm that filled the village square and streets.

A bright half moon shone compassionately through the twilight and Boito resumed in a low voice:

"Popularity is the only test, after all."

"What?" cried Ricordi. "Have you turned a fame-worshipper?"

Boito paid no heed to the question; he was intent on following the train of his own thoughts.

"What is a work of art? What makes it good or bad? We have each our own song to offer to the world. There are masterpieces that fall dead, unrecognized. But just because they are dead, I cannot accept them as masterpieces. The race of the unsuccessful may praise them, but only the popular voice can establish their claim to greatness. What a mystery is this thing we call fame! Men seize upon some book, some song, some name. They take it and into it, as into a vase, they pour their own dreams and tears. A mystic co-operation is set up, a reciprocal giving and receiving. It is not a question of genius or of chance, it is the working of some inscrutable power when a man or a deed passes into legend."

Giulio did not feel altogether in sympathy with this theory of fame. He knew that mysticism was an old snare of his friend's mind. Boito went on to establish some parallels between his theory and the theological dogma of Grace, and the conversation turned into other channels.

But they had not finished with the Maestro yet. The subject recurred and Boito confessed:

"Verdi has had a most remarkable influence on me. I am his Paul. There was a time when I hated and persecuted him, and found his music an abomination. In those days I was bound up in Wagner . . ."

Wagner!" interrupted Ricordi, "he must have suffered much on account of Wagner! Has he ever spoken of it to you?"

"Never! You know yourself how often he mentions Wagner now, though at one time he very seldom did. But always impersonally, temperately, as he speaks of everything. It may be that he never felt any rivalry."

"It is sad to think that these two never saw or spoke to each other. What a meeting! It was one of the dreams of my life!"

Boito thought otherwise.

"Is it really a misfortune? Such a meeting between artists often leads to misunderstanding."

Then they spoke of Othello, and Giulio Ricordi asked:

"Do you find any trace of Wagner's influence in the score?"

"No one with ears in his head could do that. Othello is the unmistakable descendant of Rigoletto."

"It is the greatest of all Verdi's characteristic works! He has vindicated our national music and you have helped him to success."

"The comic opera is still to come."

Boito began to chuckle with amusement.

"You might search the world for such another pair of guests," he said, "who find no harm to say of their host when they have turned their backs on him."

They reached Arda a few minutes before the train was due. As they were sitting on the platform Boito began to feel nervously in his pockets. It was the usual search for the railway ticket. Presently he drew out of his pocket a huge shapeless glove such as is worn for gardening.

"What sort of monster is that?" asked Ricordi. "Your glove?"

"No. It's Verdi's glove."

"Did you pick it up by mistake?"

"I stole it."

"What do you mean?"

"I stole it. Stole it as a memento, an autograph, as God knows what. It was a sudden impulse. A sentimentality. I'm not joking. I couldn't help it. And you have the impudence to laugh at me!"

Giulio Ricordi was laughing, but it was sympathetic laughter.

"Behold the world-famous composer of Mephistopheles—the great poet! *Ecce leone!*"

Boito put the glove back in his pocket.

"You can set me down as a schoolboy, or a young lady—or an American if you like. Come on!"

The train had steamed in.

3

"There will come a day when we shall no longer speak of melody or harmony, of German or Italian schools, of past or of future, and then, it may be, music will come into her kingdom."—*Verdi to Arrivabene.*

In the three last years of the dying century, the widowed Maestro could no longer endure the emptiness of Saint Agatha.

He lived like a child, guarded and cared for by the devoted staff of Commendatore Spatz, in the Grand Hotel of Milan.

Late one afternoon Arrigo Boito came unexpectedly into the Maestro's workroom. Verdi looked put out and guilty as Boito caught sight of the table littered with music paper, but it was too late to save himself and he sat staring out of the window in embarrassment. Boito took no notice of his annoyance, but bent curiously over the pages of music. He had always suspected that the Maestro had not abandoned writing so completely as he professed to have done. These lonely afternoons that nobody must disturb were too noticeable, and the low, quickly-suppressed sound of the piano could often be heard from the corridors of the first story. But in spite of all his artifices and traps Boito had not, till now, succeeded in piercing the Maestro's veil of mystery.

Now, as he read unhindered, he waxed ecstatic,

"But Maestro, Maestro, this is the most tremendous, the most daring work you have ever done. How could you think it possible to conceal such a treasure?"

"*Boito mio*, have you forgotten all you ever knew about music? That is mere nonsense, twaddle, child's play, the babblings of senility. *Basta!*"

Boito read on, undeterred, and shook his head.

"It is the most radical stuff I have ever seen."

"Good Lord! You are more impressed by a few eccentricities than by the loveliest melody or the purest classic style."

"Why did you never show it to anybody?"

"When people publish work to-day, they think of nothing but the effect it will have upon their fellow-artists, but I have always considered that I owe a duty to the public."

"But why write it down in that case, Maestro?"

"I can't help my weaknesses. I am too much alone. Problems, hazy nonsensical ideas worry me. It's the effect of the times, I suppose. Art is no longer intelligible. People don't talk nowadays, they exemplify the rules of

grammar. They tell me that in Paris they are painting only daubs now. Only daubs! Ah, well! there have always been such periods. Pauses for rest. They have exhausted their content. They must find new material, a new medium.

"And you also, Maestro ?"

"Yes, no doubt. I can't hold out against it. But I can keep it to myself."

The old man drew nearer to the music, as if to put this, too, out of sight. He looked at his friend with the far-sighted eyes that always seemed to overshoot their mark a little.

"Listen to me, Boito. I have found out what the great mystery, the secret that inspires all Art, is."

The Maestro spoke very simply, and as Boito looked at him questioningly he added,

"The secret of Art is fatigue."

"Fatigue ?"

"Yes, everything loses its effect after a few years of repetition. One has to find new ways of arresting attention. That is the sum and substance of æsthetic progress."

"Bravo, Maestro!"

The aged face, full of simplicity, was still turned on his friend. Boito laughed heartily and the wily Maestro seized the opportunity to gather up the sheets. The other noticed the gesture too late.

"Maestro, give me that music."

"No, no! my friend."

"I only wanted to read it quietly."

"I know, but I can't have you wasting your time over this with Nero waiting for you."

The sheets disappeared into a drawer.

Boito came nearer to the Maestro as he stood there in the twilight. The loved features of the old man, deeply worn with the lines of his eighty years, the kindly eyes in their network of wrinkles, wore such a charming look of transparent roguery that his heart was touched to tears. It was his turn to stare out of the window.

Verdi searched in all his pockets for a match. At last he found one, and after several attempts lighted the lamps on the piano. Then he drew two chairs up to the piano and placed an ancient sheet of music on it.

"So, my dear Boito! Now, let us play one of Corelli's beautiful sonatas to calm ourselves. But only one! My eyes won't hold out longer."

THE END

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